

Harvard College  
1724.

<sup>o</sup>  
PRACTICAL  
DISCOURSES

CONCERNING THE  
Christian Temper:  
BEING  
Thirty Eight SERMONS

UPON THE  
Principal Heads of practical Religion, especially  
as enjoined and enforced by CHRISTIANITY.

In Two VOLUMES.

---

*Designed for the Use of Families.*

---

By JOHN EVANS.

---

VOL. II.

---

LONDON:

*Printed for JOHN and BARHAM CLARK, at the Bible  
and Crown in the Poultry, near Cheapside; EMAN.  
MATTHEWS, at the Bible in Pater-Noster-Row;  
and JOHN MORLEY, at the Cross Keys in the  
Poultry. M.DCC.XXIII.*





DISCOURSES

CONCERNING THE

Christian Temporal:

BEING

Thirty Eight SERMONS

UPON THE

Principal Heads of practical Religion, chiefly  
as they relate to the temporal

in 2 Volumes.

Designed for the Use of Families.

By JOHN EVANS.

VOLUME II.

LONDON:

Printed by John and Barnard Clarke, at the Bible  
and Crown in St. Pauls Church-yard; EMANUEL  
MATTHEWS, at the Bible in Pall-mall; and  
JOHN M. at the Bible in St. James's Street.





THE  
CONTENTS

Of the *second* VOLUME.

*The Christian Temper in relation to  
our selves.*

SERMON I. Page 1

**P**Reference of the soul to the body, and  
diligence for its welfare.

Joh. VI. 27. *Labour not for the meat which  
perisheth, but for that meat which endureth  
unto everlasting life.*

SERM. II. III. p. 26

Christian Humility.

Col. III. 12. — *Humbleness of mind.*

SERM. IV. p. 63

Purity.

Psal. LI. 10. *Create in me a clean heart,  
O God.*

# CONTENTS.

## SERM. V.

p. 87

### Temperance.

Luk. XXI. 34. *And take heed to your selves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this Life, and so that day come upon you unawares.*

## SERM. VI.

p. 110

### Christian Contentment.

Phil. IV. 11. *I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.*

## SERM. VII.

p. 134

### Christian Patience.

Heb. X. 36. *For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*

---

*The Christian Temper in relation to other men.*

## SERM. VIII.

pag. 160

### Loving our neighbour as our selves.

Mar. XXII. 39. *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.*

SERM.

# CONTENTS.

SERM. IX. p. 187

Doing to others, as we would be done unto.  
Mat. VII. 12. *Therefore all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

SERM. X. p. 212

Christian Meekness.

Col. III. 12. *Put on—meekness.*

SERM. XI. p. 235

Peaceableness.

Rom. XII. 18. *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

SERM. XII. p. 259

A merciful Spirit.

Col. III. 12. *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies.*

SERM. XIII. p. 281

Veracity, or Truth between man and man.

Eph. IV. 25. *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.*

SERM. XIV. p. 306

Charitable Judging, in opposition to Censoriousness.

Mat. VII. 1. *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*  
General



# C O N T E N T S.

*General qualifications of the Christian  
Temper in all the branches of it.*

SERM. XV. P. 331

*Sincerity.*

I Cor. V. 8. — *But with the unleavened  
bread of sincerity and truth.*

SERM. XVI. P. 357

*Constancy and Perseverance.*

I Cor. XV. 58. *Therefore, my beloved bre-  
thren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always  
abounding in the work of the Lord.*

SERM. XVII. P. 380

*A tender Spirit.*

2 Chron. XXXIV. 27. *Because thine heart  
was tender.*

SERM. XVIII. P. 405

*Christian Zeal.*

Rev. III. 19. — *Be zealous.*

SERM. XIX. P. 430

*Christian Prudence.*

Mat. X. 16. *Behold I send you forth as sheep  
in the midst of wolves ; be ye therefore wise  
as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

SERM-



*Published by the same* AUTHOR.

1. A Sermon preached at *Chester and Wrexham*, Sept. 7. 1704. the day of thanksgiving for the victory at *Blenheim*. 4<sup>to</sup>.
2. A Sermon preached May 19. 1706. on occasion of the victory at *Ramellies*, 4<sup>to</sup>.
3. A Sermon to the Societies for *reformation of manners*, Jun. 30. 1707.
4. A Sermon on occasion of the dreadful fire in *Thames-street*, Jan. 13. 171<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub>.
5. A funeral Sermon occasioned by the death of the Reverend *Daniel Williams*, D. D.
6. A Sermon at the Evening-Lecture in *Salter's-hall*, July 15. 1716. upon his leaving that Lecture.
7. *The wisdom of owning God for the guide of our youth*. A Sermon to young people, Dec. 25. 1716.
8. *The peculiar obligations to serious Piety upon the children of good parents*. A Sermon to young people, Dec. 25. 1718.
9. *God with us, while we are with him*. A Sermon preached Oct. 9. 1720.
10. *Past deliverances and present calamities improved*. A Sermon, Nov. 5. 1720.
11. *The wisdom of counting the cost, and whether we have sufficient to finish a Christian*

*Published by the same* AUTHOR.

*tian course.* A Sermon to young people,  
Dec. 26. 1720.

12. *David's choice to fall into the hand of  
God, rather than into the hand of men.* A  
Sermon, Oct. 20. 1721.

13. *The serious consideration of a future  
judgment recommended to youth.* A Ser-  
mon to young people, Dec. 25. 1721.

14. *The consideration of sin as against God,  
and under his eye, our security in an hour of  
temptation.* A Sermon preached at *Hand-  
Alley*, July 15. 1722.

15. A Letter to Mr. *Cumming*, concerning  
the regard which ought to be had to Scrip-  
ture consequences. 1719.

16. A *second* Letter to Mr. *Cumming*, in de-  
fence of the former.

F I N I S.





## VOL. II. SERM. I.

\*\*\*\*\*

Preference of the soul to the  
body, and diligence for its  
welfare.

\*\*\*\*\*

J O H N VI. 27. the former part.

*Labour not for the meat which perish-  
eth, but for that meat which endur-  
eth unto everlasting life.*



T. Paul, summing up the duty  
which we are taught by the grace  
of God in the Gospel, expresses  
that *to our selves*, Tit. ii. 12. by  
*living soberly, or with a sound*  
*mind*, as the word, *σοφρώς*, signifies. We  
B consist



## 2 *Preference of the Soul* VOL. II.

consist of body and mind; but by this we are especially directed to see, that our mind be in a sound state. The powers of the mind are vastly superior to those of the body; and they were designed by our great Creator to sit at helm over the whole man. Now to live *with a sound mind*, is to conduct our selves, as those who have an intelligent spirit to preside in body, to direct and govern the whole.

The apostacy hath inverted this order, set the inferior powers in the throne, and enslaved the mind to the body; so that the appetites and passions we have by occasion of the body have the most commanding influence; the interests of the meaner part are apt to be most regarded; and reason, and the higher powers, instead of giving law, receive law from appetite, and are pressed into its service to minister to it.

Christianity is designed to bring us *to our selves*, or to our *right mind*; to reinstate the reasonable spirit in its just empire over the whole man. And in this view we may easily discern the several branches of the temper becoming us, with reference to our selves.

We owe it to our selves in the *first* place to *prefer* the interests of our immortal souls, before those of our perishing bodies. Which is only to form a right judgment, upon comparing the different value of soul and body.

Hereupon we should exercise *care* and *diligence* to secure our best interests, answerable to their superior value and excellence: In opposition to *negligence* and *sloth*,

And

And as we should judge fairly between our own higher and lower interests, so we should make a just estimate of our selves compared with other beings; not thinking of our selves above what we ought to think: And that will lead us to *humility*.

We should regulate our bodily appetites and passions, conformable to the dictates of reason and the higher interests of our souls. This will be done by the graces of *purity*, and *temperance*, and *meekness*. And lastly,

We ought to moderate our desires after any present good, and our resentment of present evils to the body, according to the necessity of our lot, and the reasons which religion gives to qualify both. And this is done by what we call *contentment* and *patience*.

For the two first of these duties to our selves, preferring the interests of the soul to those of the body, and suitable pains and diligence to secure those our principal interests; our Saviour in the text calls us to act in that manner.

The occasion of the words was this. Christ had miraculously fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes. The people, struck with admiration, concluded, that Jesus was *that prophet that should come into the world*, i. e. the promised Messiah, *ver. 14*. But having their minds full of the notion, which generally prevailed among the *Jews* at that time, that the Messiah was to set up a temporal kingdom; they immediately attempted to take him by force, and make him king. But Christ

withdrew himself from them, *ver. 15.* His Disciples went by ship to the opposite shore, and Christ miraculously walking on the sea followed his Disciples, unknown to the people. The people however eagerly pursue him, where they thought it most likely to meet with him; and finding him, say, *Rabbi, when camest thou hither?* *ver. 25.* Christ, who knew their insincerity, and the base reason which induced them to follow him, plainly tells them of it, *ver. 26. Verily, verily I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled.* “You do not follow me, in pursuit of  
 “ the true end for which I work my miracles,  
 “ that you may be made willing to learn of  
 “ me the way that leads to everlasting life; but  
 “ merely in hope of receiving some temporal  
 “ benefit from me, as you have lately done,  
 “ when you found your bodies fully refreshed  
 “ by the loaves and fishes.

Thereupon he gives them the exhortation in the text. *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.* “Be not so much concerned, nor take so much pains, as you do,  
 “ to obtain those things which may support a  
 “ frail and dying body; or for any outward  
 “ and secular advantage, which will be service-  
 “ able to you but a little time: But rather labour for the food of souls, which will make  
 “ you happy for ever, and *which I the Son of*  
 “ *man am ready to give you.* You have fol-  
 “ lowed



SER I. *to the Body.*

5

“ loved me for the sake of the loaves: You  
“ should much rather follow me, to receive  
“ the instructions which I am able and ready  
“ to grant, whereby you will be made wise  
“ unto salvation.

Three general heads will comprehend all that is necessary to be said upon this subject.

1. All care and pains for the interest of our bodies is not forbidden. But,

2. The interest of our souls and all which subserves that, ought greatly to be preferred before the other.

3. Much labour and diligence are necessary in order to the securing of our everlasting interest.

I. All care and pains for the welfare of our bodies, and for promoting our present interests, is not forbidden.

It may possibly seem to be so by the absolute way of speaking; *Labour not for the meat which perisheth.* But the sense of this is familiar to such as observe the manner of the Hebrew style; which often appears to forbid one thing and to command another absolutely, when it is plain that no more is intended, than that one should be done *more* than the other. Neither all *looking at the things which are seen*, nor all *affection to things on earth*, nor *laying up treasure on earth*, are unlawful, though in the way of speaking they may seem to be absolutely excluded, 2 Cor. iv. 18. Col. iii. 2. *Matth.* vi. 19. But we must consider them as



## 6 *Preference of the Soul* VOL. II.

set over against what is mentioned on the other hand along with them, and understand the whole taken together in a comparative sense. We should look *not so much* at the things which are seen, as at *the things which are not seen*: And not set our affections on things on earth, *so much* as on *things above*: Nor be *so* solicitous for earthly treasure, as to *lay up treasure in heaven*. And so we must understand the text,

For we ought to labour for the meat which perisheth.

Our bodies, while we sojourn in them, claim a part of our care. *No man, acting worthy of a man, hateth his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it.* The law of nature and the word of God oblige us to honest industry in our lawful callings and stations for the support of our selves and our families. God has so ordered it in the course of his providence for the generality of mankind, that *in the sweat of their face they must eat bread, till they return to the ground*, Gen. iii. 19. And if any, on pretence of attending to the care of their souls, should neglect their secular business, either expecting God's providential care of them, or that other people should relieve them; in truth they tempt God, and injure their neighbour. The Apostle gives them the character of *disorderly walkers, who work not at all*; and *commands and exhorts them by the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread*, 2 Thess. iii. 11, 12.

To

SER. I. *to the Body.* 7

To be diligent in our outward affairs in the proper time of attendance upon them, is as truly serving God and obeying his command, as attending his immediate worship in the proper season for that. It is as much the command of God, *six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work*, that ordinarily the greatest part of common days should be taken up in our proper callings; as that we should lay aside secular business for one day in seven. This will no way interfere with a daily acknowledgment of God morning and evening in secret and family-worship; for which a little prudent forecast will redeem sufficient time from business. Nor need it prevent some attendance on occasional means of publick instruction on week-days; which may easily be managed, if you have really a mind to it, so that your outward affairs shall not suffer by it.

To have a lawful imployment, and to be diligent in it, will preserve from many hurtful temptations. This is peculiarly desireable to imploy the activity of youth, who are led into a thousand snares by want of business or want of application to it. And for that reason such as have the direction of young people, should take care that they be engaged betimes in some way of imploying themselves suitable to their genius and circumstances. And in such a way it will be the wisdom and interest of young people to walk with God.

Nor is it unworthy of a Christian, to make his temporal interest, and even the advance-

ment of his worldly circumstances above what they are at his setting out in the world, a *subordinate* end of his labour and diligence. If it had been unlawful to propose such an end, industry would not have been encouraged by such declarations as these; that *the hand of the diligent maketh rich*, Prov. x. 4. and *shall bear rule*, chap. xii. 24. that *the thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness*, chap. xxi. 5. that such a one *shall stand before kings, and not before mean men*, chap. xxii. 29. Religion does not absolutely forbid us to aim at those ends by our diligence, which it gives us some encouragement to expect as the consequence of it. Certainly a man may lawfully and commendably labour to obtain any worldly good, which he may come fairly by, without breaking any known law of God, or injuring his neighbour, or neglecting his soul.

But our Saviour designs to teach us, that,

II. The interest of our souls, and all which promotes that, deserves to be far *preferred* before any interests of the body. Christ here sets both before us in a comparative view; and the expressions he uses, not only serve to distinguish these different concerns, but sufficiently intimate the reason of preferring the one to the other; when he describes the one as *the meat which perisheth*, and the other as *that which endureth unto everlasting life*. The Gospel often gives us this comparative view of both, 2 Cor. iv. 18. *The things which are seen*



seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. So Christ expresses himself to the woman of Samaria, Joh. iv. 13, 14. *Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: But the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.*

1. All that is for the sustenance and welfare of the body, has the character of *the meat that perisheth*. Which is apt enough to express the following things, which justly depreciate all worldly good, and yet are proved to be true by daily experience.

*Every present enjoyment may be lost.* Tho' it be ever so comfortable, ever so suitable, we hold it by no certain tenure. Whatever advantage *riches* may give us, they may *take themselves wings, and fly away*: And shall we then *set our eyes upon that which is not*? Prov. xxiii. 5. All earthly treasures are perishable things: Some of them *moth and rust* may corrupt; for others, the *thief* may *break thro' and steal* them from us, Matth. vi. 19. Devouring flames may consume a large and liberal substance, and reduce a man in a few hours from very plentiful circumstances to extreme necessity. Or if people should imagine themselves secure in an inheritance, a small observation of human life may shew, that this cannot absolutely be depended upon; for fraud or violence may turn a man out of that which appeared



appeared the firmest possession. *Health* is as uncertain as riches. When it seems most confirmed, it is not proof against the assaults of sickness or pain. All the prudence of precaution, and all the skill of the physician, cannot ascertain to us this the greatest of outward comforts. Every member of the body, every bone and joint and sinew, lies open to many unknown disorders; and we cannot always prevent those disorders from coming upon us as an armed man. If we were exalted to the highest honours, an exchange of them for the lowest abasement, and the most general contempt, is no uncommon step in life. The rich man is frequently reduced to poverty, the healthy man laid upon a bed of languishing; and the man, who stood in the first rank of dignity, is soon debased in his character and influence. So perishing, so changeable is all worldly good.

*The use and comfort of worldly enjoyments may be lost, while the things themselves continue.* In that respect they are perishing. Some of them are no more than a transient pleasure, such as *perishes with the using*: It is well, if they are followed with no lasting sting, such as makes a dear reckoning for a momentary delight: That is certainly the case in all unlawful sensualities. And those external delights, which are most innocent, in a little time upon a man's being accustomed to them leave him empty, unless he can make some new experiment for happiness. *The eye is not satisfied with*

*with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing,* Eccl. i. 8. New circumstances and new wants, which are not provided for by what we have already, will supersede the comfort and use of present enjoyments. Pain and sickness will take off the relish of riches or honours or pleasures. And especially a wounded spirit, whether arising from bodily melancholy, or from the strong temptations of Satan, or from the arrows of God stuck fast in the soul, will imbitter all enjoyments at once.

*The body it self, to which alone such comforts are suited, is perishing.* It is ever tending toward the dust, and will soon be stripped of all sensation and suitableness to the things that are in the world. What are they all to a dead carcass? That will entirely lose the relish of things once most agreeable. This is the case of us all; we are going down to the silent grave, and can carry none of those things along with us, to be of any service in the state whither we are going. All their pleasure and use, if it should happen to last so long, must have its period with the stroke of death.

On the other hand,

2. That which serves the interest of our souls, is of the most durable use. It is *meat that endureth to everlasting life*. Christ here compares bodily food with his own instructions, which were sufficient to make men wise unto salvation. These are often in Scripture represented by the emblem of food, Prov. ix. 5.

*Wisdom*

## 12 *Preference of the Soul* VOL. II.

*Wisdom crieth in the streets, come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine that I have mingled: Which is explained, ver. 6. by going in the way of understanding. And Isa. lv. 2. Eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight it self in fatness: Which is expressed in plainer words, ver. 3. Hear, and your souls shall live.*

This food of souls is said to endure to everlasting life. Not that the means of grace will last always: If we could enjoy them in the future world, the folly would not be so great in neglecting them at present: But their continuance is of as short a date as that of the meat that perisheth. This transitory life, and all such opportunities, must end together. All that is intended is, that the benefit and happy fruits of them will be eternal, if they are carefully and conscientiously improved now.

This is the argument, which our Lord intimates to induce us, while we are probationers, to prefer the interests of our souls and the means of their welfare, before those concerns which are terminated within the present life and world. And to shew the force of it, I would lay together the following considerations.

1. We have immortal souls, as well as perishing bodies. A part within us, which has no tendency to corruption and dissolution, as the earthy house of this tabernacle hath; but is designed and framed by our great Creator



to subsist for ever. When the body returns to the dust, the spirit returns to God that gave it, and is adjudged by him to endless happiness or misery. The wiser heathens by natural light made some discovery of this; but we have more abundant evidence of it by revelation; that we are *spirits* dwelling in houses of clay, of which God is immediately *the Father*, as men are *the fathers of our flesh*. These will not cease to be or to act, to feel pleasure or pain, to bear the wrath, or enjoy the favour of God, when their present dwellings shall become uninhabitable. Immediately upon death they either are *in torments*, or go *to paradise*; either become the companions of devils, or the associates of holy angels; and so remain for ever. The fashion of the world passeth away; one generation goes off the stage, and another comes on; there is a continual succession of persons and things below; the visible heavens and this earth shall in time be dissolved: But God hath taken care to assure us by reason and Scripture, that we have souls designed for eternity.

2. Our state hereafter will be determined by our behaviour here. Heaven or hell, happiness or misery, will be our final portion, just as death finds us; whether in Christ, or out of him; dead in sin, or become alive to God. For we are to *receive* hereafter *the things done in the body, whether good or bad*, 2 Cor. v. 10. *God will render to every man according*



*ding to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Rom. ii. 6,—8. Even since the apostacy, by the grace of God, life as well as death is set before us, and we are allowed our choice. We may either after our hardness and impenitent hearts treasure up unto our selves wrath against the day of wrath; or we may lay up treasure in heaven; lay up in store for our selves a good foundation, or security, for the time to come, that we may lay hold of eternal life. This is all our sowing time; and whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh, shall of his flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting, Gal. vi. 7, 8.*

3. We are often determined in the affairs of this life by the hope and fear of things to come, where we have far less certainty. All our pursuits, and I may say most of our actions, are for the sake of something future, and not yet in sight; either to prevent some evil feared, or to obtain some good desired, which are both futurities. In the beginning of life people apply themselves to become masters of some of the learned professions, or of some trade or business, in hope of a livelihood or of servicableness when they ar-

rive at maturity : But they are not sure they shall ever live to be masters of business themselves. Those who are entered upon the world, pursue their several businesses in expectation that they will answer their end ; but they are not certain of success in the most prudent steps they can take. In the affairs of our souls we act upon a future prospect ; but divine promise ascertains us of success in the way of the Gospel. That the benefit is future, is no reason therefore to abate our zeal in prosecuting it ; that is the case in our aims for this world : And we have the advantage of a better hope in our aims for another.

4. It is a plain rule of wisdom, that we should decline a present pleasure for one equal to it of longer continuance ; or that we should submit to a present inconvenience, to prevent one more lasting, or to obtain a more lasting good. We justly esteem it wisdom to act in this manner, tho' there should be no difference in the things themselves, but only in the continuance. Would a man be wise in refusing to go thro' a short course of physic, in an ill condition of body, upon a fair prospect of a regular state of health after it ? Or in neglecting to give a small sum of money in hand, upon security of enjoying a good inheritance in a little time ?

Now the most lasting things below bear no tolerable proportion to the future state. There is no room for measuring them with eternity. A minute compared with our whole

whole lives, or even with the whole duration of the world, is no disproportion in comparison of that between time and eternity. We lose all our thoughts, and stretch beyond the power of numbers in that one word, *Eternity*: For go as far on as you can, add millions of years to millions, and yet you are never the nearer to an end; an unfathomable depth is still behind. Now the state of all men at death is fixed for ever. Can we think of this, and find any pretence to prefer present things to future? Shall we prefer a minute's satisfaction, to lose an eternity of joys, or to sink into an eternity of wo? Shall we refuse *the light afflictions*, which providence may call us to bear in the way of our duty, *which are but for a moment*, when they *work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*?

5. Whatever is temporal, for that very reason is incapable of giving full satisfaction. It is a great abatement of the pleasure of any enjoyment, to think that it may be lost. In truth the more pleasant it is, so much the more afflicting will be the thought of parting. Heaven it self would not satisfy the possessors, if they had the prospect of an end. This arises from the natural principle of self-love, which necessitates our wishing for the continuance of that which is agreeable. When we are all therefore upon an inquiry after happiness, we may discern at first, that earth says, it is not



in me; for every thing here is perishing, and must soon be at a period.

6. The eternal continuance of happiness is one of the most satisfying characters of it; and the eternity of misery the most bitter ingredient in it. As it is impossible to be perfectly happy with the prospect of an end before one: So this one consideration would magnify inferior delights, to think that we should never be deprived of them: And light afflictions, the aking of a tooth or a finger, with eternity written upon them, would be an insupportable burthen. What shall we think then of perfect happiness and compleat misery, both of the highest kind, and both eternal? If we were not acquainted with the excellent nature of the heavenly joys; yet as long as we are told of this qualification of them, that they never end, we might be sure that happiness is to be found there or no where. But when we are fully assured, how great the happiness is, and that it is of everlasting duration, it must be the most unreasonable thing of all others to prefer any present good before it.

With what force and evidence then should that question come upon all our consciences, *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Mat. xvi. 26.

A *third* general head yet remains to be considered,

C

III. Labour



III. Labour and diligence are indispensibly necessary, in order to the securing of our best interests. Faint desires and transient resolutions will not be sufficient in this case, but we must labour for the meat that endureth to everlasting life. *The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath not.*

Here I shall shew, wherein our labour is to be exercised, and then the necessity of it.

*First*, Wherein labour for our souls is to be exercised.

I. In the diligent use of all appointed means of life. Some pains are needful even to keep up a stated attendance on them; to fall in with every proper opportunity for reading and hearing, for meditation and prayer, and communicating at the Lord's table. Some, by reason of the straitness of their worldly circumstances, are obliged to a closer attention to their secular business for a livelihood, than others are; and therefore they may be necessitated to redeem some time from their sleep or their recreations for the more immediate service of God, and care of their souls. Others may live at a greater distance from publick worship, and so be obliged to some bodily fatigue to attend upon it: *In their hearts, should be the ways of them, who passing thro' the valley of Baca made it a well,* Psal. lxxxiv. 5, 6. This is a description of such, who living remote from *Jerusalem*, yet  
out

out of love to the temple-worship, and in obedience to God who enjoined all the males to come up to it at certain times, passed cheerfully thro' the dry and desert valley of *Baca*, as if it had been plentifully furnished with wells for their refreshment by the way. Happy they, who so love the habitation of God's house, or his publick ordinances, as to be content to pass thro' some difficulties, rather than omit an attendance on them.

But much more labour and pains are needful with our own hearts in religious duties, to fix our attention, excite proper affections, and exercise that humility and reverence, that seriousness and fervency, without which the outward performance will be of little service to our souls. A careless temper of mind in our use of appointed means, is most unsuitable to God, and renders them useless to our best interests. But good men are sensible, that it is no easy matter to secure their thoughts from wandering, to raise pious and devout affections or to keep them up, to exercise faith or love, or self-abasement, or any other grace suitable to the work in which they are engaged. They find by experience no small occasion for care and conflict, for pains and application, both before and in holy duties, to perform them to advantage. And certainly, if we consider them as the means of our salvation, we shall not think those pains unnecessary, without which they cannot be spiri-

tual sacrifices, either acceptable to God or profitable to our selves.

2. In opposing the enemies and difficulties, which are in our way. As we must enter upon religion with a prospect of difficulties, and a resolution to adhere to God in defiance of all: So we cannot maintain our ground, and acquit our selves like Christians, without labour and diligence; to resist the Devil in all his known assaults, to overcome the world in its insnaring influence, and to mortify the irregular inclinations of our own hearts. Beside that we may be called to sufferings for righteousness sake, which will occasion no small conflict between nature and grace, notwithstanding all to *run with patience the race that is set before us.*

3. In making continued advances toward the perfect day. *The path of the just shineth more and more unto that day,* Prov. iv. 18. He, who hath his heart really fixed upon heaven, never thinks himself sufficiently meet for it, but still endeavours a progress. Now this calls for constant application and diligence, 2 Pet. i. 5. *Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, &c.* We must still continue to *cleanse our selves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.* As a man of letters, who has a true relish for learning, never thinks he has learning enough; so a Christian, in his labours for everlasting life, is never satisfied with



with present attainments, but would abound more and more. You have a noble instance of this, and of incessant labour thereupon, in *Paul*. Tho' he had attained much, yet he forgot what was behind, and reached forth to apprehend more; still pressing forward, and bounding his desires and ambition by nothing short of the resurrection of the dead, *Phil. iii. 10, &c.* We should copy after that pattern.

*Secondly*, The necessity of labour and pains, as it plainly appears from the cases wherein it is to be exercised; so might be made evident in many other ways. I shall only mention two.

1. It might be concluded from the necessity of labour to the securing of our present interests. What is there valuable in this world, ordinarily to be obtained without pains? And can it be thought, that heaven, the greatest blessing of all, should become our portion at unawares? Must we labour for the meat that perisheth, and can we flatter our selves that the meat which endures to everlasting life can be had without labour? It is indeed an argument that present things have the ascendant in our practical judgment, if we can allow our selves in such a thought.

2. We have the plainest declarations of God in the present case. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*, Luke xiii. 24. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*,



22 *Preference of the Soul* VOL. II.

Phil. ii. 12. The promise is made only *to him that overcometh*; which cannot be done without pains and labour, while there is a Devil to assault, corrupt hearts to oppose our better inclinations, and many difficulties to be encountered. The conduct of those who are heirs of the heavenly country, is described in Scripture by the most indefatigable pains that are laid out about any thing in the world; by the incessant labour of the husbandman, the continual progress of a traveller, the painful exercises of a soldier, the diligent application of a merchant, the toil of a race. Thus good men in all ages have found their way to glory; though the farther progress they made, and the clearer views they had of the prize before them, so much the more easy and pleasant they accounted their work to be.

And now be persuaded to bring all this home to your consciences by a personal application.

1. Seriously examine, whether the care of your souls or of your bodies has had the preference with you to this day. I mean not, whether you have never had convictions, that your souls deserve the preference; nor whether you are not ready to acknowledge this in discourse: But which in fact you have practically set the main value upon? What things are you most afraid of? Those which are detrimental to your bodies, or to your souls? *i. e.* in other words, which do you most fear, sin or suffering? On the other hand, which gives you  
most

most pleasure? That your bodies prosper and are in health, that your estates increase, that your families flourish, that you have success in your business? or that you can have reason to hope, that *your souls prosper*, that the divine life improves in them, that you gain some advance in the mortification of irregular appetites and passions, that holy ordinances are more pleasant and profitable to you? Especially, how do you behave upon a competition between the interests of both? Which interest are you determined to maintain and abide by, when you find you must quit the one for the sake of the other? Put such questions as these to your selves, and allow conscience to make a faithful report.

2. If the interests of your souls have hitherto been shamefully neglected, allow me to expostulate with you in the apposite words of the prophet, *Isa. lv. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?*

Why do you mainly pursue that which you know cannot satisfy, when you may obtain an infinitely greater good? If *the meat that perisheth* was the best you had in view, there might be some pretence to say, *let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die*, and we have no views beyond that. But when we may inherit substance, shall we act with indifference for that, and imploy all our pains for that which hath vanity written upon it by the word of

24 *Preference of the Soul* VOL. II.

God, by the testimony of the wisest men, and by our own frequent experience?

Why should you spend more for present good, than it is worth? Should you throw away your immortal souls for it, when nothing can be given in exchange for your souls?

Why should you make so disadvantageous a bargain, after frequent warnings given you of it by a compassionate Saviour and those who speak in his name? After many disappointments in your own most raised expectations from the things of time?

Why should you employ your excellent talents so ill, when they are plainly given you for a better use? The spirit of a beast would have been sufficient for the employment and happiness of a beast: But when your Maker has given you a capacity of looking forward to immortality, of judging between the value of things present and future, of chusing and prosecuting your best interests; when you have such noble powers, you must account not only to your selves, but to your Maker also, for your usage of your souls, of your selves: And certainly you can give no good account either to God or your selves, for neglecting the one thing needful. And once more,

Why should you neglect your souls for the sake of your bodies, when in the ordinary state of things you may comfortably mind both? When a regular care of your souls will admit  
of

of all reasonable concern for your outward welfare too; and will give you a better security, than you can have any other way, for all that is needful and good for you in this life? *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you,* Matth. vi. 33. And by securing the future happiness of your souls, you provide for the everlasting glory and felicity of your bodies too in the morning of the resurrection. Therefore,

3. Be persuaded to make everlasting life your governing aim through the present life, and not only a concern on the by. When Christ is come into the world to seek and save lost souls; when your time below is principally given you to mind their interest; when the many dangers attending them require your earnest application to prevent their ruin; be in earnest here, where-ever else you allow your selves to trifle. I may happily add for your encouragement in this case, what you cannot be assured of in the most diligent and prudent labours for the meat that perisheth; that you shall not fail of success. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord,* 1 Cor. xv. 58.





## SERMON II.



### Christian Humility.



COL. III. 12. middle of the verse.

—*Humbleness of mind.*

The whole verse runs thus,  
*Put on therefore, as the elect of God,  
 holy and beloved, bowels of mer-  
 cies, kindness, humbleness of mind,  
 meekness, long-suffering.*



THE *first* instance of being *wise for our selves*, is to put the principal value upon that part of our selves, which is most noble and durable, *our souls*; and to use our main diligence for securing their welfare. It is *another* branch of wisdom, to make a right estimate

estimate of our selves, compared with other beings, either above us, or of the same order with our selves. Christian *humility* is the very temper to which such a thought will lead us. And that is to be our present subject.

St. *Paul*, in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> verses of this chapter, expresses his charitable hope of the *Colossians*, that they had *put off the old man with his deeds; and had put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.* And hereupon, in the text and some following verses, enumerates several particular excellencies, which are parts of the new man; and therefore he exhorts these *Colossians* to *put them on.*

If any should say, since the Apostle had already supposed that they had put them on, why does he yet exhort them to do so? especially why does he *therefore* exhort them to it? The answer is plain. His charitable hope was founded upon their avowed profession of Christianity, which was in other words a profession to have put on the new man: He therefore justly exhorts them to shew, that this their profession was sincere and genuine, and his hope concerning them well founded, by all the actual and proper expressions of a renewed disposition. Or, supposing them to have been undoubtedly renewed already, yet there would be room for improvement and advance in every part of the christian temper; and therefore they should still put on the new man

man more and more, daily grow in the strength and activity and just expressions of every holy disposition. Among these, *humbleness of mind*, our present subject, is reckoned up for one.

My business shall be, 1<sup>st</sup>, To explain the nature of this holy temper. And 2<sup>dly</sup>, To shew the special obligations, which lye upon us as Christians, to cultivate it.

I. I would explain the nature of this temper, or shew wherein true humility of mind consists.

The word, ταπεινοφροσύνη, which is here and in several other places of the new Testament used to express this christian virtue, signifies in general a *low apprehension* or esteem: And from the scope of the places, tho' the word does not directly express so much, it must mean a low apprehension or esteem of *our selves*. I think the Apostle's exhortation, in *Rom. xii. 3.* is a natural paraphrase upon that in the text; *I say, thro' the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly.* It stands directly opposed to pride and arrogance. Generally the word is used in Scripture in a good sense; but twice in one chapter of this epistle in a bad one, *Col. ii. 18, 23.* for a base and unworthy subjection of mind; Which shews, that there is occasion to guard against mistakes in this matter, as well as to illustrate the



SER. II. *Christian Humility.* 29

the excellent temper designed to be expressed by it.

It is farther to be observed, that the word leads us to consider it principally as a disposition of mind; suitable to the scheme I am upon. There may be a seeming humility of outward expression and behaviour, which covers a very proud heart. But Christians are called to put on *humbleness of mind*, and not only a humble demeanour; tho' humility in the heart will certainly produce the proper fruits in the behaviour.

The actings of this temper will be best discerned in a relative view, as we entertain a humble opinion of our selves, compared either with God or with our fellow-creatures. And the description of it, as well as the distinguishing of it from what is unworthy and unbecoming, may, I think, naturally fall under the following particulars.

1. A humble apprehension of our own *knowledge*. *Knowledge*, St. Paul observes, *puffeth up*; is very apt to do so, 1 Cor. viii. 1. There is nothing, which men are more ready to be proud of, and to think better of themselves in beyond desert. Many would sooner bear a reflection upon their moral character, than upon their understandings. One would think the serpent was early sensible, that this was man's weak side, when he made use of that artifice to seduce our first parents, to assure them, that if they would  
but



but follow his counsel, *they should be as gods, knowing good and evil*, Gen. iii. 5. And we may remember what an unhallowed flame this kindled in their inclination. And tho' they soon had sad evidence of the falshood and folly of the suggestion; yet notwithstanding so clear a confutation, there is no part of original sin, which they seem to have derived more universally and more strongly to their posterity, than a proud surmize that they have gained what the Devil then promised. No branch of pride hath more need of a cure, tho' indeed none hath less to support it, than conceit of our own knowledge. *Vain man would be wise*, and would be esteemed wise, *tho' he be born like the wild asses colt*, Job xi. 12. Now the beginning of humility, and indeed of true wisdom, lyes in moderating our conceit of our own sufficiency this way. And so it will include,

1<sup>st</sup>, A sense of the natural imperfection of our faculties. There is indeed a dignity in our natures in comparison of the lower creation, as God hath made us intelligent beings; but we should ever remember, that the faculties he has given us are but finite and limited at the best; and that many things are above them, which they cannot grasp, *things too wonderful for us, which we know not*, Job xlii. 3. We find it so even in natural things; the wisest and the greatest men will readily own themselves to be posed in several of these :

these: And much more may it be expected to be so in things supernatural; especially in what belongs to the great God, his nature, and purposes, and the mysteries of his providence. *Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* Job xi. 7.

Now a just sense of this imperfection of our own capacities, will dispose us absolutely to credit God's testimony, as far as he has been pleased to give it, and we can discern his mind, whatever difficulties may attend that revelation, as to the manner of things discovered by it, beyond our capacity to solve. God's word alone will be a sufficient reason of faith to a humble mind. And on the other hand, it would teach us *not* to pretend *to be wise above what is written* in matters of pure revelation; not to venture to form schemes of our own to account how such things are, where none are delivered in God's word; at least not to be positive and dogmatical in them: But in *the deep things of God*, to satisfy our selves to understand so much of them as God hath revealed by his Spirit in his word; because such *things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*, any farther than he has been pleased to make them known, 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11.

2<sup>dly</sup>, An apprehension of our own fallibility, and liableness to mistake, even where we may think we judge aright. When we consider the power of prejudice, our readiness to make rash

rash and hasty judgments, the plausible colours which may be put upon error, the indisposition of our minds in our fallen state for the admission of divine truths; when we consider these things, we have reason in most judgments we form to carry this cautionary thought along with us, that it is possible we may be mistaken. Who is there among us, who is not conscious to himself, that he hath actually been mistaken in many former judgments he hath made of things, even in some wherein once he was very positive? And certainly this is a good reason, why we should carry the thought of our fallibility about with us in our future time. Those indeed, who have made the deepest searches, and the most impartial inquiries in every age, have discovered most mistakes in themselves; and therefore have justly entertained the most lively sense of the possibility of their being still mistaken in many things.

Now humility in this view would teach us,

Not indeed upon that account to surrender our selves to the absolute conduct and government of other men, who are fallible as well as we. To this the Church of *Rome* would lead us, but on pretence of infallibility to rest our selves upon; though they neither are agreed among themselves where to place it; nor give us any proof from Scripture or their own conduct, that such a glorious gift is lodged with them. If any others would lead us to such an implicit faith in their dictates, while



while they disclaim infallibility ; their claim is still more absurd. If our judgments be not so good, or our capacities not so enlarged as our neighbours ; yet we are obliged to make the best of them, and to judge for our selves. Christ blames the body of the *Jewish* people for *not judging of themselves what was right*, Luke xii. 57. We must answer for our selves to God in the great day : And therefore it can neither be a laudable nor a safe humility, to take our religion from the dictates of any fallible man or number of men.

But a just apprehension of our own liability to mistake, should induce us in all our searches after divine truth to be very desirous of divine illumination and guidance ; that God by his Spirit of truth would *shew us his ways, teach us his paths, and lead us in his truth*, Psal. xxv. 4, 5. It should keep us ever open to farther light, willing to learn ; we should never behave, as if we had made our last understanding, but be willing on any proper occasion to review our sentiments, and to allow a cool and unprejudiced consideration of what may be said against them. And though we should not see reason to change our own thoughts upon such inquiries, but be more confirmed in them ; yet we should be tender in our censures of others, whom we apprehend to be mistaken, as long as they give credible evidence in other respects that they are conscientious.



3<sup>ly</sup>, A moderate apprehension of our own attainments in knowledge, when we compare them with the attainments of other men. Every good man indeed judges himself to be in the right in every particular sentiment which he maintains; for if he was convinced that it was an error, he would give it up: And it must necessarily follow from hence, that he cannot but think those of a contrary judgment to be mistaken, as long as he judges himself in the right. Is he therefore to be puffed up above others? No, by no means. But it is a becoming humility in most cases, even where we think our selves in the right, yet to believe it possible however, that those who differ from us *may* be in the right; and therefore to be willing to hear what they have to offer for their judgment. If we judge our knowledge superior to others, with whom we compare our selves; yet we should still remember, that in this life *we all know but in part*, 1 Cor. xiii. 9. If some know less, others know more than we: If we are better acquainted with some particulars, they may exceed us in other parts of knowledge: We may have made less improvement in proportion to our greater advantages, than they have made of fewer opportunities: And especially that after all, we owe it more to the providence or the grace of God than to our selves, that we are distinguished from the most stupid and ignorant in the world. Humility therefore will keep us from despising any, and incline us to learn all we can even from

from the meanest: For it will possess us with this truth, 1 Cor. viii. 2. *If any man think that he knoweth any thing,* and as the context shews the Apostle to mean, because of that knowledge despiseth others; *he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.*

4<sup>thly</sup>, A persuasion of the small value of the most exalted knowledge, without a suitable practical influence. Knowledge, even of divine things, is of little valuable use but in subservience to practice. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them,* Joh. xiii. 7. It will not render us more acceptable to God, but more inexcusable, and liable to *be beaten with many stripes*, if we rest in the most extensive knowledge, Luke xii. 47, 48. A man comparatively of low attainments in knowledge, if his heart is right with God, is truly acceptable; while a resolved sinner, though he understood all mysteries, will be eternally disowned by him: And no wonder, since exalted knowledge may leave a man of no better a temper than a Devil.

2. Humble thoughts of our own *goodness*, is another branch of humbleness of mind. Not that we are required to be insensible of any thing, that is truly good and valuable in us. But christian humility includes,

A sense of the undeservingness of our own goodness at the hands of God, even if it was perfect. Whatever the pride of nature may suggest, this is the lesson which Christ teaches his Disciples, Luke xvii. 10. *When ye shall*

*have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do, and no more.* It could not properly deserve divine favour: How much less capable are we of merit by any thing we do in our lapsed state?

An apprehension of the great disparity there is between the goodness of God and the goodness of any creature. From which our Saviour teaches us to conclude, that *none is good save one, that is, God*, Luke xviii. 19. None is originally, absolutely, necessarily and unchangeably good, but God only. Created goodness is derived from God; compared with his, it is incomplete, and capable of addition; and in its own nature it is ~~un~~changeable; as we find the goodness of angels and of innocent man was in fact.

An affecting conviction of our own sinfulness, and of the guilt contracted by it. Evangelical humility implies a sense of our lost and miserable state by the Apostacy; so that we cannot lay claim of our selves to the divine mercy, and yet can have no hope without mercy: That we are not only less than the least of his mercies, but have forfeited them all, and deserve ill, deserve wrath at his hands; and could not hope to stand, if he should mark iniquity: That from a lively sense of this, we are heartily willing to be beholding to the Gospel-way of relief by the atonement and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and rely upon that alone for our pardon and acceptance  
with



with God, as conscious we have nothing in our selves to rely upon. This is one principal part of Gospel-humility, that we see our selves *sick*, and therefore to *need the physician*; and *sinners*, who *need repentance*, Luke v. 31, 32. That we humbly call to remembrance our particular offences, and penitently confess them before God, suing for his pardoning mercy in Christ, with the temper of the publican, *God be merciful to me a sinner*, Luke xviii. 13. And that from a sense of our desert of worse, we chearfully submit to his present corrections. We must proudly forget our own case, when we repine at his mild discipline.

A sense of the imperfection of our goodness at the best in this world, is another branch of humility, to which the Gospel leads us. If we are recovered from the dominion of sin, yet without insufferable pride, we shall see reason to confess, that we sin daily, and come short of the glory of God; that we *cannot understand* all our errors, and need to be *cleansed from our secret faults*, Psal. xix. 12. That no grace or holy disposition is compleat in us, but ever needs improvement; and is subject to interruption in its exercise, and great decays.

An acknowledgment, that we are principally indebted to God for whatever is good in us, is also to be comprehended. That we principally owe to him the beginning of any good work in us; and must expect from him the perfecting of it, *Phil.* i. 6. If we are better than others, we owe it to the grace of God, who hath *made us to differ*, 1 Cor. iv. 7. Either we were as bad



as any, till we were *washed and justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*, 1 Cor. vi. 11. Or we might have been as bad, was it not for the restraints of his providence or grace. In a word, the humble soul, whatever goodness he is conscious of, has this for the abiding and thankful sense of his soul, *By the grace of God I am what I am*, 1 Cor. xv. 10.

And lastly, a modest apprehension of our own goodness, compared with that of other men, must enter into the christian temper. I say not, that christian humility will oblige us to condemn our selves as worse than all others; though, as we know our selves best, it is ordinarily true, that we know more amiss in our selves, as to the number if not the kinds of sin, than we can do in any other particular person. But it will dispose us to esteem as well at least of other people's goodness, as of our own, as far as there are credible evidences of it: In which sense the Apostle exhorts, *Phil. ii. 3. In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves*. We should not admit uncharitable jealousies and evil surmisings of them, where we have no just foundation; but think the best of them that we can; and observe their excellencies, as well as their defects; the excellencies in which they may shine above us, though we should exceed them in some others. Humility will incline us to make all charitable allowances for their failings and defects, when we are conscious of so many  
of

of our own: To censure them with gentleness, *Rom. ii. 1.* To restore them in the spirit of meekness, *Gal. vi. 1.* And not vauntingly to say to any, *stand by thy self, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou,* *Isa. lxxv. 5.* A lowly mind will consider even the worst of men as such with whom we partake in the same nature, the same sinful nature; who are bought with the same price, as we; who have an offer of the same spiritual and eternal blessings; and are at least capable, by the same grace which hath made us to differ from them, of the same everlasting happiness.

3. A humble sense of our *dependance* and *wants*.

And here *first* and principally, we are concerned to have a humble sense of our dependance on *God*, and our need of him. That in the sphere of *nature*, we cannot subsist of our selves, but *live and move and have our beings in him*, *Acts xvii. 28.* That *our times are in his hands*, the time of our continuance in life, the circumstances of our lot and condition, and all the particular events that can any way concern us. If *he takes away our breath, we die, and return to our dust*, and cannot recall it for a moment longer. Our understandings and reasonable powers continually depend on him. A slight touch of the brain may soon raze out all the traces of wisdom and knowledge, and change a wise man into a fool or a mad-man, unless *God* protect our powers in their regular course. If he will speak peace, who can speak

trouble? And if he will exercise us with rebukes, we are never out of his reach, but he can easily *make a way to his anger*. We hold no comforts by any tenure but at pleasure. He has an unlimited, uncontrollable power over us, and an indisputable right to do with us as seems good in his sight. If our souls are under the power of these apprehensions, humility will teach us to live in daily dependence on him for every thing we need; to expect our supplies from his favour and blessing, more than from the kindness of our friends, or from the wisest measures we can take our selves; to maintain a constant thankfulness for the bounties of providence; not to be much lifted up for the sake of any of those loseable comforts; and to suppress every fretful and impatient murmur at any of the events that befall us.

And in the sphere of *grace*, we should have an equal sense of our constant need of his influences. That we need his mercy to pardon our sins, and help our infirmities every day. That we can perform no religious exercise well, nor discharge the duty of any relation commendably, nor acquit our selves honourably in any trial, nor make any advances in the divine life, nor be blessings in our generation, without the light and grace of his good Spirit. That we need his quickning influences to think a good thought, and to bring it to maturity; his supplies of light and strength to overcome any temptation, to succeed



succeed in any conflict, or even to maintain the ground we have already gained. To live in the constant lively sense of this, and therefore not to trust in our own hearts or our best endeavours, but in his grace and blessing, is one eminent part of *walking humbly with our God.*

But then, *secondly*, a humble sense of our subordinate dependance upon *our fellow-creatures*, and the need we have of them, is not to be omitted in the description of humility. We should consider, that by the law of our creation, our condition is so ordered, that we cannot comfortably subsist independent of our fellow-creatures. Even those in the most advanced and easy circumstances of life, need the assistance of their inferiors; yea, the plenty they enjoy could not enable them to be more at ease than the meanest, if they had not the benefit of their labours. *The king himself is served by the field*, Eccl. v. 9. and is indebted to the industry and pains of those who cultivate it: And the various conveniences and accommodations of life, which some enjoy above others, could not be attained with all their wealth, if the diligence and skill of those much below them was wanting. Every link in the chain of societies contributes to the good of the whole. In the body politic, as well as in the natural body and in the body of Christ, *the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you: — But God hath tempered*



pered the body together, that there should be no schism in the body, 1 Cor. xii. 21, 24. This should make all sensible of their dependent state, and of their interest in the society to which they belong. And beside this dependance of the highest on the lowest at all times; it should be remembred farther, that in the changeableness of human affairs, those who are now in the most prosperous estate, know not how soon they may need the *kind offices*, the *good-will* of those in the lowest condition of life. Instances of such an alteration continually occur, and therefore should abase the pride of those who may now be most exalted. This naturally leads to a *fourth* branch of humility,

4. A modest apprehension of our own *rank* and *station*.

And compared with the *blessed God*, we cannot think too low of our selves. So the *nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing*, Isa. xl. 15. All the relations, in which we stand to him, bespeak the profoundest submission due from us: As we are his creatures, his subjects, preserved by him every moment, disposed of at his pleasure, and such as must appear at his bar. The very relation of children, which bespeaks the greatest friendship on his part and freedom on ours, yet obliges to humility before him. All lead us highly to magnify him, and to abase our selves: So  
the

the very angels above behave. His condescension should be adored in every favour he shews, because he *humbleth himself to behold the things in heaven or upon earth.* And therefore the language of our hearts upon the view of all his benefits, should be like David's, Psal. viii. 4. *What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?* Psal. cxliv. 3. *Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him? or the son of man that thou makest account of him?* Or with Job, chap. vii. 17. *What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?* Humility will teach us neither to dispute the precepts nor the providence of one, who needs not our consent to give him a right to rule us, but has a natural authority over us, and is necessarily and infinitely exalted above us.

Revelation also teaches us to consider our selves as beneath many *other invisible beings*, by the state of our creation: As *made lower than the angels*, Psal. viii. 5. A rank of creatures behind them in the original capacity of our natures, while even the highest of them is infinitely beneath the blessed God.

And for our *fellow-creatures of the human race*, we should consider them all, as of the same nature with us, and therefore near akin; *God having made of one blood all nations of men, that dwell on the face of the earth*, Acts xvii. 26. That any distinctions made by outward circumstances, are in the account of God

God and in themselves, really but little things : That if the distinctions made between us and others, in the figure made in the world, were ever so important, the providence of God has been much more concerned than we, in making that difference : And that all differences between men, beside those of true goodness, will entirely cease with the stroke of death.

In such a state of our case, humility will dispose to the chearful performance of the duties of humanity to all men ; esteeming them all as our brethren, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. We shall not put any mighty value upon our selves, meerly because we may enjoy a larger share than others of the riches or honours of the world ; but reckon the human nature, which they partake of along with us, to set us all more upon a level, than the differences of outward rank can exalt one in value above another ; and esteem goodness to ennoble and recommend more than meer greatness. But since the providence of God our common ruler, is principally concerned in the differences made in men's outward rank, a humble mind will not think much of observing the duties to others, whether above or below him, which the word of God hath annexed even to those providential differences between their and his own lot. If they are above him, he will chearfully *render them their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour*



SER. II. *Christian Humility.* 45

*to whom honour*, Rom. xiii. 7. And on the other hand, if he stands in a superior rank, will readily *condescend to men of low estate*, chap. xii. 16. Be willing to do to them any good offices in his power, and to treat them with modesty and courteousness, without any thing of supercilious contempt.

These things may set in a competent light the nature of the christian virtue of humility. It will be your wisdom to turn in upon your selves by way of reflection, and to inquire how the temper of your own spirits stands in this matter. We shall see in the next discourse the importance of the inquiry.



SERMON





## SERMON III.



### Christian Humility.



COLOSS. III. 12. middle of the verse.

*Put on— humbleness of mind.*

II.



I am to shew the special obligations, which lie upon us as Christians, to cultivate a humble temper.

I. Humility is a grace of the first rank and eminence in Christianity. So that, while it seems to carry in the notion of it a lessening of our selves, it exalts a man in the

SER. III. *Christian Humility.* 47

the christian character above any thing else. This may appear several ways.

1<sup>st</sup>, It is mentioned in Scripture with peculiar marks of distinction and honour. Under the old Testament, when God would sum up the things which are eminently good in his account, this is marked for one, *Mic. vi. 8. He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* Pride is stigmatized as his peculiar abhorrence; but humility honoured with the fullest testimonies of his approbation. *Pride and arrogancy—do I hate,* says wisdom, *Prov. viii. 13. Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly; but the proud he knoweth afar off.* *Psal. cxxxviii. 6.* When the Son of God condescended in our nature to instruct mankind, he sets humility in the front of his beatitudes, and at the head of his excellent sermon, *Mat. v. 4. Blessed are the poor in spirit:* As if it was the first lesson, in which he would have his Disciples instructed. The importance of it, and the rank it holds in our religion, is still more emphatically described by him in another place, *Matth. xviii. 4. Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven,* or in the Gospel-Church, the christian dispensation: As if he had said; He that excels in humility, is the greatest and the best Christian. It is a laudable ambition to aspire  
at

at this foremost rank of honour among the Disciples of Christ.

2<sup>dly</sup>, The most distinguishing promises are made to it: Such as mark it out for a temper, eminently in the way of divine favour. The prayers of the humble are entituled to a peculiar regard, *Psal. ix. 12. He forgetteth not the cry of the humble*, *Psal x. 17. Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear*. They are encouraged to expect the gracious presence of God abiding with them, *Isa. lvii. 15. Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place: With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones*: So does the divine Majesty condescend; as if he would signify to us, that in a sort with the humble he will shew himself humble. Such are assured of farther measures of grace. While God *resisteth the proud, he giveth grace to the humble*, *Jam. iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5*. The proud shall miss of the aim they have so much at heart, self-exaltation; but the humble are in the way to the truest glory, while they seem to fly from it, *Mat. xxiii. 12. Whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased; and he, that shall humble himself, shall be exalted*. He shall be high in God's estimation, God is like to put the greatest honour on such a one by the use he makes of him, and even  
men



men are commonly more disposed to respect him.

3<sup>dly</sup>, It is in its own nature a necessary introduction to the other graces and duties of Christianity. This is not a religion calculated for the proud, but the lowly.

Humility is necessary to faith. Without this we shall not be in a disposition to receive every doctrine of divine revelation as an undoubted truth upon the sole testimony of God, and to silence our objections by that only authority. Pride and self-sufficiency was the principal reason, why *Christ crucified* was of old to the Jews a *stumbling-block*, and to the Greeks *foolishness*.

It is equally necessary to obedience. A proud unbroken heart sets up for it self, and at least practically says, *who is Lord over me?* It must therefore be first humbled, before the language of it will be, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Acts ix. 6.

Without this frame we shall not value a Saviour, so as to receive him and make use of him as he is offered in the Gospel. We shall not be fond of being beholden to another for our pardon and acceptance with God, till we have an abasing sense of our own guilty and miserable condition. *The whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick*, Luke v. 31. As long as men *think that they are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not, that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;*  
E they,

they will pay little regard to Christ's *counsel to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that they may be rich; and white raiment, that they may be clothed*, Rev. iii. 17, 18. This was the foundation of the difference of behaviour between the pharisee and the publican: The *Pharisee trusted in himself that he was righteous, and despised others*; and so came to God with an arrogant self-sufficiency: But the publican had a lively sense of his own sinfulness and unworthiness; and therefore came in the most humble manner, and with the most humble request, *God be merciful to me a sinner*, Luke xviii. 9, — 13.

Without a humble spirit we shall not prize the grace of the holy Spirit, nor live in a constant dependance on his aids: Unless we are sensible of the deceitfulness and badness of our own hearts, and of our own insufficiency for that which is good.

Without humility we cannot persevere in our adherence to Christ; but shall be ready to take offence, when we are called out to trials and exercises. The proud mind, that is full of it self, is not easily content to bear reproaches, to be meanly thought of by others, to be exposed to the trial of cruel mockings, to sacrifice reputation and honour and ease and every valuable outward comfort to the pleasing of God and the securing of a good conscience. But humility will go a great way to make all these things sit light. That will form our souls to a placid resignation to the will of God, as  
wiser

wiser and fitter to determine our lot than our selves. We shall not brook so ill the reflections of other people, when we have a just sense of much amiss in us. We shall not think much of any ill usage we meet with by the way, or think we have any reason to complain; when we are conscious that we deserve much worse, that we are less than the least of the mercies we enjoy; and especially that the heavenly reward, as it is unspeakably great, so is altogether undeserved. And humble apprehensions of our selves compared with other people, will go a great way toward silencing complaints, when we consider what others have undergone, who were much more wise and holy and useful than we.

Without this grace, we shall be indisposed to receive that assistance from other men in the way to heaven, which we might obtain. Those, who are wise in their own conceit, despise the admonitions of their pious parents and friends, are impatient of reproof, are above ministerial instructions; and for want of a modest apprehension of their own defects, suppose themselves too good proficient in knowledge to learn, or in goodness to improve.

And lastly, without this lowly disposition we cannot possibly perform that compass of duty to our fellow-creatures, which makes so great a part of true Christianity. A haughty mind will ill comport with *becoming all things to all men, that we may gain some; with pleasing our neighbour for his good to edifica-*



tion; with *bearing all things*; with the forgiveness of injuries; with condescension to the weaknesses and humours of other men, and to the meanest offices when we can have hope of doing them good thereby.

So evident is it, that humility is a grace of the first rank in Christianity.

2. It is a grace, which adorns every other virtue, and recommends religion to every beholder. If all the characters mentioned in that rule of conduct, which the Apostle lays down in *Phil. iv. 8.* can be said to meet in any one grace, it is in humility. *Whatsoever things are true, have a just foundation in the reason of things, whatsoever things are honest, or honourable, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* Our light cannot more effectually shine before men, than by not affecting to have it shine, that is, by humility. Hence *St. Peter* calls us to *be cloathed with humility, 1 Pet. v. 5.* And *St. Paul* in the text to *put it on*, as an ornament. It casts a lustre even upon attainments comparatively low; while pride eclipses the beauty of great and distinguishing excellencies. It conciliates esteem from all, even from the proud themselves, who value that in others which they care not to practice in their own case. And therefore, as we are concerned to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*, and to take care that *our good be not*

SER. III. *Christian Humility.* 53

*not evil-spoken of*; it concerns us to live in the exercise of humility; without which all the train of christian graces beside, would suffer in their amiableness, and their use for the glory of God.

3. Humility is eminently recommended to us by the example of the author and finisher of our faith. There is hardly any one part of the amiable character of Christ, of which the Gospel-history gives us more instances, than of his humbleness of mind; nor any, in which he is more frequently and expressly proposed to us for a pattern. For instance,

1<sup>st</sup>, His assuming the human nature was the highest instance of humiliation, that ever was or could be given. That *the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, should consent to be made flesh*. Though he was no lower a person than *God blessed for evermore*; yet he vouchsafed to descend from the habitation of his holiness and glory, to lay aside in appearance his divine character, and all that visible glory which had been used to attend him in his manifestations under the old Testament; and was content to take upon him the nature, the state, and the sinless infirmities of mankind; to be *made of a woman, made under the law*. This was an instance of humility, of which none but himself was capable; which indeed is so far above our direct imitation in the letter of it, that the manner of it exceeds our comprehension. And yet it is a very proper argument to inculcate upon us

humility in our measure, and with that view is proposed to us by the Apostle, in *Phil. ii.* He had among other things exhorted to *lowliness of mind*, ver. 3. And adds, ver. 5. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.* How was such a temper shewn by Christ? It follows, *Who being in the form of God*, [being truly God, or, having been used to appear under the old Testament with a godlike glory, which he would not have been suffered to do, had he not been true God,] *thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation*, [emptied himself, or, as the same word is rendred, 1 Cor. ix. 15. *made void* his glorying, as to the outward manifestation of his glory;] *and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.* *Though he was rich*, with the riches of the godhead, *yet for our sakes*, out of his abundant grace to us, *he became poor*, 2 Cor. viii. 9. But how should the same mind be in us, which was thus expressed by the eternal Son of God? We should never then think much of any instance of self-abasement suitable to our measure, to which we can be called for serving a valuable end; and be always sensible, that it can never come up to this amazing condescension of the Son of God.

2<sup>dly</sup>, When he appeared in the world in the human nature, he affected not worldly glory and honour. He contented not himself merely to lay aside the glory of heaven, and his glorious appearance by the *Shechinah*, and to enter



SER. III. *Christian Humility.* 55

enter upon the condition of mortal man, which at the best is unspeakably low and mean in comparison of the divine glory; but he appeared in the world with many additional circumstances of meanness. He descended from a family, which was then very obscure, which had lost the antient dignity and grandeur of his father *David*. *Mary* his mother was a woman in a low condition; capable of giving the Lord of glory but very poor entertainment at his coming into the world; and therefore at his birth, *she wrapped him in swaddling-cloaths, and laid him in a manger, because there was then no room for them in the inn,* Luke ii. 7. There were no servile attendants, no sumptuous preparations made for his nativity; but, as in his after-life, so now, he had scarce *a place where to lay his head*. The shepherds could never have divined without the instruction of an Angel, that here and in this manner was *born a Saviour, which was Christ the Lord*, ver. 8,—11. And the wise-men of the *East* must be under a divine conduct, to find the King of the *Jews* in such a despicable place. While he was growing up, he lived with his reputed father, a carpenter; and thence was stiled *the carpenter's son*, Mat. xiii. 55. When he entered upon his publick ministry, the generality of those whom he chose for his Disciples and followers were poor fishermen, or men of a like condition. He made no outward figure, and mainly sojourned in places of small note. He had no wealth,

or ſecular honour ; not ſo much as a ſettled habitation or certain proviſion. He contemned worldly honours, when they were offered him ; as when the people would have taken him by force, and made him a king. He chearfully underwent poverty and contempt and ill uſage of various kinds, before he ſubmitted to the laſt act of his humiliation, to be *obedient unto death, even the death of the croſs.*

Now ſurely all this was to recommend humility to us, to teach his Diſciples not to ſeek high things for themſelves, nor to value themſelves much upon a large ſhare of worldly enjoyments. If he had thought, that outward ſhew and grandeur would have ſerved thoſe ends better, for which he came into the world ; he could eaſily have ſecured to himſelf all the riches of the earth, and have appeared with a pomp far ſuperior to the miſtaken apprehenſion of the *Jews* concerning their Meſſiah. But he rather choſe to teach his Diſciples humility and ſelf-denial and mortification, by his own voluntary entrance upon the ſtage of life and paſſing over it to the end, in a low condition.

3<sup>dly</sup>, As man, he was a pattern of great humility toward God. He *ſought not his own glory, but the glory of him that ſent him,* Joh. viii. 50. chap. vii. 18. This was his profeſſed aim through his courſe on earth, and conſpicuous in the courſe of his words and actions. Hence as man, he diſclaimed any pre-  
tenſions

tensions to such knowledge, as was above the capacity of his human nature, or his attainment at that time, *Mark* xiii. 32. And when one, who took him for no more than a man, seemed to ascribe goodness to him in too exalted a sense for a creature; he expostulates with him about it; and asserts the perfections of godhead to be so peculiar, that even those, wherein creatures may bear the divine image, do yet belong to God in such a manner as they can belong to none else: *Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God*, *Mat.* xix. 17. He ascribed the glory of his works to his Father. He was entirely obedient to his commands, for what he should say and do, in the minutest circumstances, and for the hardest services. He cheerfully submitted to his will in the severest sufferings: And paid him all religious homage in acts of worship. The remarkable instances of this have been produced in another discourse, when he was represented as an example of *godliness*.

4<sup>thly</sup>, He was a pattern of the greatest humility to mankind.

He was ready to condescend to the meanest in order to their good. Most of the miracles he performed, were wrought upon those who were of a low condition. When a man of figure besought him to heal his servant, he was as ready to do that kind office for him, as if it had been the master himself, *Mat.* viii. 6, &c. He stood still in the way to regard the cry of a poor



poor beggar, as much as if he had been a man of the greatest consideration, when the multitude would fain have silenced him, *Mark* x. 46, &c. And esteemed it as *his meat and drink* to maintain a conversation with the poor woman of *Samaria*, in order to her soul's advantage, though *his Disciples marvelled that he talked with her*, *John* iv. 27. He overlooked not even little children; but called his followers to learn good instructions from them, and to be very tender of them. *Matth.* xviii. 1,—10. In the next chapter we find him taking them up in his arms and blessing them; and when his Disciples rebuked those who brought them to Christ, he would have them suffered to come to him, *chap.* xix. 13, 14.

He was willing to stoop to the meanest offices for the meanest persons. He freely touched a poor man, who was over-spread with a leprosy, in order to his cure; though it was naturally ungrateful and legally unclean, *Mark* i. 41. And particularly recommends the greatest condescensions to his Disciples, by using an emblematick action for that purpose, of washing their feet, *John* xiii. 5, &c. Thus he made it evident in his whole conduct, that *he came not to be ministred unto, but to minister*, *Mat.* xx. 28. And yet, which was another instance of humility,

He was not above receiving and acknowledging the respect shewn him by the meanest. He accepted the charitable contributions of

some good women, who *ministred unto him of their substance*, Luke viii. 3. He takes notice of the honest and well-meant *Hosannahs* paid him by children, *Mat.* xxi. 15. And the more hearty mark of respect shewn him by the woman who poured ointment on his head, as he sat at meat, he has put an everlasting mark of honour upon, *Mat.* xxvi. 13.

Now how forcible an engagement should this be to all who profess a relation to him, to imitate him in a virtue, which made so great a part of the character of their master? *To learn of him, who was lowly in heart*, *Mat.* xi. 29.

4. Humility is a grace, which will go along with us to heaven. The only inhabitants of that world, who were ever lifted up with pride, have been long ago cast down from thence to hell. The *Seraphim* cover their feet in presence of the divine Majesty, magnify him with incessant adorations, and abase themselves continually before him, *Isa.* vi. 2, 3. The representations given us of the glorious company above in the new Testament, bespeak the same lowliness of mind before God. *The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne*, *Rev.* iv. 10. And to the same purpose, *chap.* v. 14. And as a farther description of the humility of their adoration, they are said to *fall before the throne on their faces*, *chap.* vii. 11. and *chap.* xi. 16. God in that world is all in all; and every blessed spirit

spirit there, up to the most exalted celestial mind, maintains the sense of infinite distance, in the midst of the most familiar and satisfying approaches; and receives the bounties of the great Creator, *crying, grace, grace.* We have a specimen of the humble temper attending saints to the judgment-day, in the representation of it given by our Saviour, *Matth. xxv.* When the judge will take notice of their acts of charity, and put the most kind and gracious construction upon them that can be, as done to himself in his members; they are represented as having so low an opinion of their goodness, that they can hardly think themselves to deserve the commendation. *Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? &c.* While the sinner is described as carrying his fond conceit to the bar, and hardly convinced of the neglects charged upon him by his judge: *When saw we thee an hungred, &c. and did not minister unto thee?* We may say indeed in commendation of humility, beyond many other graces; that it is greater and more excellent than they, for the same reason that *love* is preferred by the Apostle to *faith and hope*; because *it never faileth*, 1 Cor. xiii. 8, 13.

### I N F E R E N C E S.

1. Those, who are destitute of this grace, whatever profession they have made of Christianity, have in truth the rudiments of it yet to learn. If they have been soaring upward to  

I
heaven



heaven it self in the sublimest speculations; if they have built up their hopes to the greatest height upon other grounds, without laying this at the foundation; they must be content to come down again to learn this lesson, which enters into the elements of Christ's religion. A *proud Christian* is a contradictory character; as much as it would be to say, *a wicked saint*. The whole Gospel, in its precepts, its great example, its glorious prospects, tends to humble the pride of man: And therefore, whoever will come after Christ, must in this respect *deny himself*.

2. We should look principally to the temper of our spirits, to judge of our humility. We may have the character of humble people with men from a modest outside, a negligence of garb, a condescending carriage, lowly speeches; while the God that searches the heart, may see pride reigning there under these fair disguises, and that all such plausible appearances are only intended to gratify and support a haughty and over-bearing disposition. *Humbleness of mind* makes the christian temper; and *the poor in spirit* are the heirs of the promise.

3. No single branch of goodness deserves more of our attention, in order to judge of the improving or declining state of our souls, than this of humility. If we grow in knowledge, and are puffed up along with it, we lose more in goodness, than we gain in profitable furniture. If we improve in other excellencies, but out-strip that improvement in the conceit

we

we have of our selves; we only make those things nothing in the sight of God, which would otherwise be valuable. This is a *dead fly, that will spoil the whole box of ointment*. Whether we advance in right knowledge of God or our selves, it cannot fail to make us sensible of our defects, and humble in the sense of them. A man that improves in learning, sees more defects in his attainments, when he hath made a good progress, than he did at setting out: He discerns a larger field of knowledge before him, after all his advances, than he had any notion of, when he first turned his thoughts that way. So it is with a lively Christian; he sees so much before him, that he *forgets the things that are behind, and reaches forth unto those that are before, still pressing toward the mark*, Phil. iii. 13, 14. This was *Paul's* character, when he was most fixedly set in heaven's way; and it will be the character of any Christian, when he is ripening fastest for the heavenly harvest.

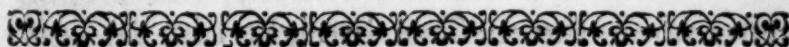




## SERMON IV.



Purity.



PSAL. LI. 10. the former part.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God.*



THE principal concern we have about our selves, after the determination of the preference due to our souls above our bodies, is to regulate the appetites and passions we have by occasion of the body, conformable to the interests of the soul, and the precepts of God concerning them. *A clean heart*, which is here prayed for, is one of the



the first things of that kind, which should come into our consideration.

This is sometimes taken in so extensive a sense, as to signify holiness in general, in opposition to all sin, which is often in the Scripture-style represented as the defilement of the soul. In other places it is to be understood in a more confined sense, for the temper directly opposed to criminal sensualities, or the ascendant of irregular appetites; to that which eminently bears the name of *filthiness of the flesh*, 2 Cor. vii. 1. and especially to the violations of the *seventh* commandment. Thus we are to understand the *clean heart* in the text.

The Psalmist had fallen into the horrible sin of adultery, and being awakened to repentance upon the message brought him by *Nathan* the prophet, he composed this Psalm; wherein, besides very suitable abasing confessions of his sin, he earnestly solicits for pardoning mercy, to remove his guilt; for sanctifying grace, to take away the stain it self, with which such heinous offences had polluted his soul; and for a recovery of the comfortable sense of both in his own conscience. The passage now proposed to consideration, is among the expressions, wherein he prays for sanctification. He had not been an utter stranger to this blessing till now; but eminent falls introduce such a general and surprising disorder into the soul, that a man has in a sort his work in religion to begin a-new. There-  
fore

fore *Peter's* recovery after his scandalous denial of his Master is spoken of, as if it was a second conversion. *When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*, Luke xxii. 32. So the heinous sin of *David* had poisoned his soul afresh with impure thoughts and irregular inclinations, in such a manner, that he saw occasion to apply again for God's creating power, to recover him to a clean heart, as if he had never had one.

In considering this part of a good spirit, I would 1<sup>st</sup>, Shew, what is included in purity or cleanness of heart, as it stands opposed to fleshly lusts and sensual practices. 2<sup>dly</sup>, Point at some of the obligations we are under, to seek after and cultivate such a temper of soul.

I. I would enquire into the meaning of a *clean heart*, or the proper ingredients and expressions of such a temper of soul.

And you cannot but discern, that something more is intended by it, than a bare abstinence from the outward and gross acts of criminal sensuality. Would to God, that none of these shewed their face in a christian land! that there was no reason to lament many open instances of impurity and lewdness which hardly shun the light! If the visible reformation of manners was advanced, much dishonour and provocation to the blessed God, and grief to the hearts of good men would be prevented, and the contagion of

vice would not spread as it does. But tho' the works of the flesh are undeniable evidences of an impure heart ; yet other restraints may prevent outward enormities, where the heart is not truly purified. Men may be *like whitened sepulchres, which appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness*, Mat. xxiii. 27.

That, which the Psalmist had in his desire, and which every Christian should have in his, is, that the matter may be carried much farther, into the temper of the soul ; that there may be not only *clean hands*, but *a pure heart* also, which are both united in the character of a citizen of *Zion*, *Psal. xxiv. 4*. And such a purified heart will import such things as these.

I. A fixed habitual abhorrence of all forbidden indulgences of the flesh. Since human nature is corrupted, and bodily appetite has lost the bridle of reason and religion ; the affections are become impetuous toward sensual gratifications ; the hearts of sinners, or their love and liking are on that side. Or if the remains of natural conscience are so strong, and the bias of fear, and of shame in reference to other people so far prevail, as to restrain from open pollutions ; yet they content themselves with this, tho' all the while a rooted aversion to all fleshly lusts upon the principles of religion and duty is wanting. Here is the turning, discriminating point in God's account, between a clean and an impure heart.

A man,



A man, whose heart is purified, looks upon sensualities as hateful to God, as *warring against his soul*; and therefore has a fixed detestation of them, as enemies to God and to his own best interests. His *fear of God*, and his *love to him*, lead him thus to *hate evil*, Prov. viii. 13. Psal. xcvi. 10. This fixed bent of heart against impurity, is that which principally constitutes a clean heart; and from this, all the other fruits and expressions of such a temper will proceed.

2. All past impurities, either of heart or life, will be reflected on with shame and sorrow, where there is a clean heart. It is true, that which hath been done, cannot be recalled, so as that it should cease to be fact. But when any sin is recalled to remembrance with unfeigned repentance, the heart is in a Gospel-sense purified from the stain of that sin.

There are too many, who *glory in their shame*, Phil. iii. 19. They not only give a loose to their vicious inclinations, but think of them with pleasure afterwards, pride themselves in them, and speak of them with a relish. They are *not ashamed, when they have committed abominations*; *neither can they blush*, Jer. vi. 15. You may too often meet with such old offenders, as, when they are unable, by reason of the decays of age, any longer to practise the excesses of their youthful days; yet instead of penitential tears and deep humiliation for their former crimes, call them to remembrance with an impudent pleasure,

sure, boast of them as mighty achievements, and seem sorry for nothing so much as that they can practise them no longer. A spectacle, that strikes every serious mind with horror ! God alludes to this in his charge against *Israel*, Ezek. xxiii. 19. *She multiplies her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.* God is there censuring the people of *Israel* for their spiritual whoredom or idolatry, that they provoked God afresh by looking back with delight upon the idolatries practised by their ancestors in the early days of their state : But this is expressed by an allusion to persons acting over again their youthful sins with pleasure upon the stage of their imagination, and so renewing their offence in God's account. Others think of their former offences with a cold indifference ; or if there is any remorse, it is rather for the prejudice which they may have done to their health, or estate, or reputation, than from a sense of their sin against God. The sin of such people remains, both in the book of God to their condemnation, and in the dominion of it in their own souls.

But it is the mark of a clean heart, to remember any past impurities with godly sorrow and a deep contrition of soul. He *acknowledgeth his transgression, and his sin is ever before him*, Psal. li. 3. Every review opens the springs of penitential grief ; and while he feels some kindly softnings, yet, like the

the Psalmist in the text, he is solicitous for farther cleansing, for a heart still more *purged from his old sins*. Thus the frame of *Ephraim* is described, *Jer. xxxi. 19. I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth*. The hopes of pardoning mercy will not extinguish, but excite genuine repentance, according to God's design in the discovery of it, *Ezek. xvi. 63. That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee*. Every new benefit conferred by a reconciled God, will heighten the displeasure of a clean heart at past offences, *Ezek. xx. 42, 43. I will bring you into the land of Israel, [out of your captivity in Babylon.] And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled, and ye shall lothe your selves in your own sight, for all your evils which ye have committed*. This is a happy indication of the temper prayed for in the text.

3. A clean heart imports, that the heart is actually freed in a good measure from impure thoughts and irregular desires; or at least, that they are not entertained with pleasure and delight.

The refining and regulation of the fancy and imagination, is a considerable branch of the purification of the heart; that vicious thoughts come not so often and so easily upon the stage at every turn, as they are apt to do



in a mind devoted to sensuality. St. Peter speaks of some, 2 Pet. ii. 14. who *have eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin.* And the old world was so abominably corrupt, particularly in sensualities, as the context shews, that we read of them, that *every imagination of the thoughts of their heart was only evil continually,* Gen. vi. 5. Many have reason and every sober thought drowned, either in actual fleshly indulgences, or in a succession of vile imaginations in the intervals between gross acts of sin. Every slight occasion serves to revive impure images; and if they set themselves to think, it is to *make provision for the flesh, that they may fulfil the lusts thereof.* Their heart answers the description of *Babylon*, in Rev. xviii. 2. It is *the habitation of devils, the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.* A clean heart is a heart discharged from such habitual pollutions; wherein better thoughts, such as are holy and heavenly, have place, and are entertained with true delight, as chosen and welcome guests.

I say not, that no impure or irregular thoughts do occasionally come into the minds of such, who have attained to an evangelical purity. Such evil imaginations may be injected and darted by Satan, into the mind of the most virtuous and good person in the world; or such events may occur in the course of things, as can hardly fail to make a sudden impression upon the fancy. But if immediate

mediate care is taken to guard against the ill tendency of such impressions, as soon as they are discerned; if irregular inclinations, which arise from foreign influence, are disallowed and opposed as soon as born; God will not be strict to mark iniquity: nor ought persons severely to condemn themselves for these, because they are so far from discovering the dominion of impurity, that they are hardly voluntary. It is not unusual for melancholy people to torment themselves exceedingly with such thoughts; in like manner as they are afflicted with some blasphemous thoughts, which they find at times started in their minds. Whereas in both cases, the very horror and detestation, with which such thoughts are entertained, might, if they could consider things justly, take off their black apprehensions of themselves because of them. For whether they are from the Devil, or the product of bodily distemper, or from whatever source they arise; as long as they are rejected with abhorrence, they are more their affliction than their sin; or if they are sinful, will be imputed to the Devil rather than to them. It is no more than a temptation, to have them come into their minds; if they resist the temptation, summon up their own endeavours, and call in divine help to master it; if the language of the heart be, *Get thee behind me Satan, thou art an offence to me*; then instead of incurring guilt in the sight of God by such vanquished

temptations, they will be ranked by him among those who *overcome*.

But tho' the bare presence of such thoughts occasionally in the mind, will not argue an impure heart, as long as we are rather passive than active in them; Yet if once we give our consent, as far as we take any pleasure and delight in them, or even if we can bear them with indifference; we immediately become transgressors. Then *the thought of foolishness is sin*, Prov. xxiv 9. tho' it should proceed no farther than the heart. When men set themselves to ruminate upon any impure ideas that are offered to the fancy, till their affections are engaged, and unhallowed flames are kindled in their breasts; then they are defiled by them in God's account, whether they ever break out into act, or not: When *out of the heart* it self, disposed to them and siding with them, *proceed evil thoughts*, suppose of *murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*; such evil thoughts, when they have gained the heart; and so proceed from it self, *defile the man*, Mat. xv. 19, 20.

On the contrary, he who is of a clean heart, *hates vain thoughts*, Psal. cxix. 113. It is his desire, as much as possible, to guard against their entrance; but if they enter, he will not suffer them quietly to *lodge within him*, Jer. iv. 14. He cannot be at rest, till they are dispossessed and gone.



4. A clean heart discovers it self by a cautious fear of the least degrees of impurity. While obstinate sinners make no account even of open enormities; and others think all well, if they do but abstain from them; a heart formed to real purity goes much deeper. He is careful to *abstain from all appearance of evil*, 1 Theff. v. 22. He dares not allow himself to go to the utmost bounds of things lawful, because he reckons himself to be then upon a precipice. If he feels any of the poison working within, it gives him a sensible concern, tho' no human eye can discern it.

5. A clean heart necessarily implies a careful and habitual guard against every thing, which tends to pollute the mind. The pretence of a good heart in any kind is vain, unless it be *kept with all diligence*, Prov. iv. 23.

Where there is therefore a bent of heart to purity, it will engage a man to maintain a guard over his senses, which provide furniture for the imagination, and are the conveyances of external temptation. The case of *David*, to which this Psalm refers, is a melancholy instance upon record, how dangerous it is to allow the senses an unrestrained liberty; no man indeed can fail to be sensible of this. Upon this account *Solomon* leaves the caution in relation to an ill woman, *Prov. vi. 25. Lust not after her beauty in thy heart; neither let her take thee with her eye-lids.* And our Lord and Master forbids  
men

men to *look upon a woman to lust after her*, Mat. v. 28. Agreeable to the resolution, which holy *Job* had made long before for the preservation of his own purity, *Job xxxi. 1.* For the same reason, lascivious pictures and representations of any kind should be avoided by all who would preserve their virtue inviolate ; and the reading of all impure and licentious books. Nor can I see how it consists with a just concern to keep the mind unspotted, to resort to *plays* and *masquerades* ; which I believe have been too successful corrupters of the present age. Most of the present *plays*, in their structure, and scope, and thoughts, are wickedly adapted to vitiate the fancy, and recommend a dissolution of manners : And by the beauty of action, the arts used to strike the passions, and the loose morals of the generality of those who represent them, and of the company that attend upon them, they have such a tendency to instil vice, that it is hardly possible for persons to be often present at them without weakening the guards of virtue ; and great numbers of young people, who were before untainted, have been introduced this way into the school of vice, and soon have made a dismal proficiency. The practice of *masquerades*, which were of late revived among us, but which, thanks be to God, have been restrained by publick authority, was still more dangerous than the other. In these, unnatural disguises, and an apprehension

sion of the concealment of character, on the one hand expose to such attacks upon virtue, as would scarce otherwise be attempted; and on the other hand abate those restraints of modesty and decorum, which providence often makes use of to preserve people from notorious impurities, who have not the best principle, of the fear and love of God, for their security. Would to God, that all, who have taken Christ for their Master, would maintain such a sense of the infirmity of human nature, as to keep at the remotest distance from the known incentives to sensuality: And that they would take care also, that young people under their charge may be fortified by all the prudential methods they can use, against frequenting those nurseries of vice.

All loose and vicious company will be avoided as much as may be, by those who have a clean heart; such company, as by their practice and converse evidently shew the impurity of their own hearts. This we are cautioned against, 1 Cor. v. 11. And the reason is evident; *evil communication corrupts good manners.* This danger seems to be intimated in the manner of expression used in *Jude 23.* *Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire:* Be not wanting in your best endeavours for the recovery even of profligate and accustomed sinners, as you have opportunity for it; but then let your attempts to reform them be attended with fear, lest you should receive any infection from them: And therefore



fore the Apostle adds; *hating even the garment spotted with the flesh*: Set about their reformation, with a lively apprehension of the danger of such society, that it is hard even to touch pitch, and not be defiled; and therefore be sure, that you keep up a fixed abhorrence of their sin, while you apply your selves to reclaim them.

Intemperance will be carefully avoided by those, who have an earnest concern to maintain their purity; not only because of the sinfulness of it in it self; but because it lays a man open to many other sins, and particularly to impurities. Therefore the Apostle joins a caution against both of these together, *Rom. xiii. 13. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, nor in chambering and wantonness*: Not only as each of these, separately considered, is opposite to a christian conversation; but also as rioting and drunkenness is so often the introduction to chambering and wantonness.

And, to advance a step farther; a heart formed to the sincere love of purity, will not think much to restrain himself in some things, which may be lawful in themselves, and safe to many others; if he finds by experience, that they ordinarily prove occasions of sin to him. Tho' he will not censure others, where the law of God does not censure them; yet he will make it an ordinary rule to himself, to forbear as far as he can that which seldom fails to be a temptation to him.

II. I proceed to represent the obligations that lye upon us to seek after such a purity of heart.

I. A ruling inclination to sensuality is directly contrary to the purity and holiness of the divine nature. *God is a Spirit* : He has made us indeed to consist of flesh and spirit : But if we give an unbridled loose to fleshly appetite, instead of keeping the body under the dominion of the higher faculties ; we shall abandon all that, wherein we are capable of bearing the image of God, and *become like the beasts that perish*. And this cannot be done by us without the guilt of debasing our natures, when God had made us capable of nobler pursuits, and better relishes. It is observable, that in three several places, where sin is spoken of as *against God*, reference is had to the sin of uncleanness. So it was in *Joseph's* case, when he overcame the temptation with this thought ; *how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* Gen. xxxix. 9. *David's* confession in this Psalm had the same special evil in view, ver. 4. *Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight*. And the prodigal son is represented to have *wasted his substance with riotous living*, Luke xv. 13. and in another verse, to have *devoured his living with harlots*, ver. 30. And without doubt he had that as much as any other sin in his eye, when he resolved to return to his father with this penitent acknowledgment, ver. 18, 19. *I have sinned*

ned against heaven, and before thee ; and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Thus the Scripture leads us to consider this sin as eminently against God. How much are we obliged therefore to cultivate purity ? and especially purity of heart, since properly we can bear the image of God only in our spirits.

2. Sensuality has a special tendency to extinguish the light of reason, and to unfit for any thing spiritual and sacred. *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine take away the heart*, Hos. iv. 11. Such criminal indulgences are both the effects of great blindness, and the means of increasing it. *Eph. iv. 18, 19*. No sort of sin commonly hardens the heart to a greater degree : Of which *David* was a melancholy instance ; he seems not to have been recovered to a penitent sense of his fall, till he received a message from God by *Nathan* the prophet ; and that was not till after the birth of the child. Nothing makes the mind more averse to sacred exercises, or indisposes it more for the serious and spiritual performance of them. Hence the deluded youth, who gives himself up to sensualities, is described, when he comes to *mourn at last*, as reviewing this, among other pernicious effects, of his evil practices, *Prov. v. 14*. *I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly*. His vices had so leavened his mind, that his thoughts were full of them, even when he appeared in worshipping assemblies.

3. Sensuality



3. Sensuality is most contrary to the design and engagements of Christianity. Our blessed Lord and Master inculcated the strictest purity upon all his Disciples; not only an abstinence from the gross outward acts of uncleanness, but from polluting thoughts and desires. To this purpose he vindicates the spiritual intention of the seventh commandment, in *Mat. v. 27,—30*. And in his practice kept at the remotest distance from every thing that had an impure aspect. His intention in *giving himself for us* is declared to be, *to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar people*, *Tit. ii. 14*. We are to consider *our old man as crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin*, *Rom. vi. 6*. *Sin should not therefore reign in our mortal body, that we should obey it in the lusts thereof*, *ver. 12. i. e.* A sinful inclination of mind to the indulgence of bodily lusts, should not be suffered to prevail in us. So, when the Apostle puts the *Thessalonians* in mind *what commandments* he and his fellow-servants in the Gospel had given them by the Lord Jesus. *i. e.* by his authority, and under the direction of his Spirit; he presses this as a matter of special obligation on Christians, *1 Thess. iv. 2,—5*. *This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour: Not in the lust of*  
I  
concu-

*concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God.* When Christ was ascended into heaven, he puts a most particular mark of his abhorrence upon *the deeds and doctrines of the Nicolaitans*; and at the same time of his approbation, on those Christians who abhorred them, *Rev. ii. 6, 15.* Those *Nicolaitans* were a set of vile and filthy hereticks at the beginning of Christianity, who taught doctrines of the utmost licentiousness, while they disgraced the christian name by wearing it; and their practices were as lewd as their principles. The holy Jesus by a message from heaven takes care to stigmatize these filthy dreamers, and to animate his Disciples to a rooted hatred of every impure principle and practice.

The Apostle in several places urges this purity upon Christians from another argument, their participation of the holy Spirit of God. *They are the temple of God, by the Spirit of God dwelling in them; and therefore they might be assured, that if any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy, 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.* And elsewhere, that *they are the members of Christ, and the temples of the holy Ghost: Shall I then, (says he) take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid, chap. vi. 15, 19.* Whatever others do, a Christian, who professes to be united to Christ by his holy Spirit, should abhor the thought of foolishness.

4. The blessed hope, with which Christianity inspires us, lays us under a forcible engagement to present purity.

Those of the contrary temper, are absolutely excluded, by the express declarations of the Gospel, from the kingdom of God, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. *Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God.* Heb. xiii. 4. *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* And such are reckoned up among those, who *shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone*, Rev. xxi. 8. and who are *without the heavenly Jerusalem*, chap. xxii. 14, 15. On the contrary, the promise of the future blessedness is most plainly made to the pure in heart, *Mat. v. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.* And this very representation of the heavenly felicity, that it principally consists in the sight and fruition of a holy God, shews, that his constitution limiting that happiness to the pure in heart, is founded in the nature and reason of things. We cannot relish it, or be made happy by it, any more than be allowed to share in it, without a heart refined from the dregs of sensuality. Saints themselves have but an imperfect relish for it here, since they are not divested of all remains of sensual inclinations: But because they will be made perfectly righteous in the future state, and raised to their full re-

G

semblance



semblance of God in spirituality, therefore the enjoyment of him then will give them full satisfaction. So the Psalmist joins these circumstances together in his prospect of the other life, *Psal. xvii. 15. As for me, I will, (or, shall) behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness.* In the same manner St. John speaks of our future condition, 1 *Joh. iii. 2. We know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* But observe, how thereupon he infers the necessity of present aspirings and endeavours after a resemblance of divine purity, in all the expectants of heaven, ver. 3. *And every man, that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure. i. e.* Every man, who makes heaven his hope and real desire in this justest view of it, as a state of likeness to God, and of the nearest enjoyment of him; cannot fail to have a prevailing and a growing relish for purity now.

Let us all then, *by way of application*, seriously inquire, what the temper of our own souls is in reference to the subject we are upon. The vast moment and importance of it appears from what has been last offered. And upon the inquiry, we shall either see reason to judge that an impure spirit prevails in us; or to hope that our hearts are in a good measure made clean: And even then, we shall hardly fail to discern great defects  
in

in our purification in a higher or lower degree.

If you see reason but to fear, that an impure spirit hath the dominion ; seriously consider, what a holy God must judge of you ; he can look upon you no otherwise, than as altogether *alienated* from him and *from the life of God* ; of a temper most opposite to his nature and will. And can you think, that *for these things he will not bring you into judgment* ? That he will not call his reasonable creature to a severe account, for so base a prostitution of his noble powers ? Especially a reasonable creature under the Gospel ; which contains the strongest engagements, and proposes the most effectual assistances, for recovering impure souls ? Can you entertain the least hope of standing in the judgment, when you are to be judged by this Gospel ? And yet, how far soever your impurities have proceeded, if you are awakened to a serious conviction of your sin and danger ; despair not either of a cure or of a pardon, if you take the course prescribed in the Gospel. It is left upon record, for encouragement to the chief of sinners, when they are awakened ; that the Apostle, after he had reckoned up some of the grossest sensualities, and declared that they would certainly exclude from the kingdom of God ; yet plainly signifies, that he only means this without repentance ; and immediately gives instances of the effectual reco-

very even of such offenders, 1 Cor. vi. 11. *Such were some of you ; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* Here is a sufficient provision for all the washing, that even *you* need ; for your sanctification by the grace of the holy Spirit, and for your justification and pardon thro' the blood of Christ. Here were souls sunk into the lowest impurity, but effectually relieved in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. And these will be as effectual for your relief. But what course must be taken in order to your being washed by these means ? Apply to God by earnest prayer. The text directs you, Go to God, and say, *create in me a clean heart, O God.* Go with the humble serious cry of the publican, *God be merciful unto me a sinner,* Luke xviii. 13. Go with the prodigal son, acknowledge your guilt and unworthiness, and say, *make me as one of thy hired servants,* Luke xv. 18, 19. And in dependance on the grace, which God has so many ways encouraged you to ask, set your selves to break off your sins by repentance. *Cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light. Awake from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light,* Eph. v. 14.

If you can justly hope, that purification is begun in heart and life ; adore divine grace, which has made you to differ, and has plucked you as brands out of the burning. If, by  
God's



God's blessing upon a pious education, you have grown to a sincere abhorrence of impurity, without any remarkable sallies of youth by the way; you have particular reason to be thankful for this; as it has prevented many miseries to soul and body in this life, which give no small uneasiness to some other converts. If you are recovered from a sensual course; yet the happy change of your circumstances should greatly affect you, while you see so many around you proceed in the way to destruction to their lives end. Aspire after greater and higher measures of purity, still endeavouring farther to *cleanse your selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*. And remember, that the hopes you have of your present state should not make you secure; but *watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation*. The case in the text, of a man so eminently good before, is a standing admonition against security.

If you have fallen into any sensualities, since you came to the knowledge of the truth, *David's* example in this Psalm will give you proper directions of conduct. There must be particular and solemn repentance, answerable to the aggravating circumstances which attend such a sin in you. You should not be easy, till at least you recover the ground you have lost, both in your holiness and your comfort. And if you have *caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*; you have all the reason in the world to submit, as *David* did, to any

G 3

penal

penal rebukes of God for it, in any way which he takes to vindicate his own honour; and to do all you can for the same purpose, by a repentance as publick as your offences.

And as the best have reason to own the imperfection of their purity in the present state, tho' they are *kept from the greater transgressions*; so they have reason to *walk humbly with God*, daily to review and make up their accounts with him, to be always upon their guard against greater offences; and while they dwell in body, to pursue the work of *mortifying the deeds of it*.

To close all; the *young* have peculiar reason to reckon this subject to concern them. The evils I am cautioning against, are by way of eminency *youthful lusts*. That age of life is more than any other addicted to impurities: And therefore the guard should be answerable. On the other hand, it may truly be said to be a crime more aggravated in those advanced in years, if they should retain the same vicious turn of mind; and it is possible, that they may have a most impure heart, even when they have outlived the servicableness of their bodies to the dictates of a carnal mind. Young and old are concerned in this subject, and should often make this prayer.



SERMON



## SERMON V.

### Temperance.

LUKE XXI. 34.

*Take heed to your selves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.*



IN these words it may be proper to observe,

I. The person, who spoke them ;  
Christ himself, our Lord and Master, the author and finisher of our faith :

G 4

Which



Which at first view claims a peculiar regard to them from all who wear his name. They contain one of his solemn commands, which he esteemed of great importance to be inculcated: And therefore I hope that no Christian will think himself unconcerned in them, or that they are an unfit subject of Gospel-preaching.

2. The persons, to whom they were peculiarly directed. Christ spoke them to his own Disciples. Many of his discourses were delivered to them and the multitude promiscuously. But what we have in this chapter, was the subject of a conference between him and his professed Disciples alone. St. *Luke* indeed only observes of the rise of this discourse, *ver. 5.* that *some*, without any mark of distinction, *spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones, &c.* And that upon Christ's foretelling the utter desolation of it, *they* (the same persons, whoever they were,) *asked him, when these things should be; &c. ver. 7.* But St. *Matthew* in his parallel account informs us, *Mat. xxiv. 1.* that they were *his Disciples*: And *ver. 3.* that *his Disciples came unto him privately*, and put their questions to him. St. *Mark* is yet more particular in their names, that *Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew asked him* those things *privately*, Mark xiii. 3. I observe this to shew, that as such an admonition concerns all, so it is not unsuitable to Christ's professed Disciples. If Christ saw fit to leave such a caution with his Apostles; then, if we will take his judgment, the best of men should

should think themselves concerned even in warnings against sensuality. Thus the Apostle to the *Colossians*, after he had expressed his charitable hope that they *were risen with Christ*, Col. iii. 1. yet directs an exhortation to the same persons, not merely to guard against sins of infirmity, but to *mortify their members which are upon earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, and covetousness*, ver. 5.

3. The exhortation contained in the words to a care and concern about our selves. *Take heed to your selves*. Such an exhortation is laid down in the new Testament upon several occasions. It imports in general the peculiar care we are obliged to take of our selves, more than of any beside. It intimates also the matter introduced with so solemn a caution to be of great importance; and at the same time our proneness to behave ill in such a matter without care and diligence. And all this we are to understand by it here.

4. The general matter, with reference to which we are directed to exercise our care for our selves. *Lest our hearts be overcharged*. Our Saviour teaches us to be mainly careful of our principal part, our souls; and particularly, that they be not rendred unfit for their proper and most excellent acts by too great an ascendant of the body and its concerns over them. The word, which we render *overcharged*, βαρυνω, signifies *to be pressed down*; as a man is held down by more weight upon him  
than

than he can weild ; or as a ship, by being overloaded, is made unfit to sail. So it ought to be our concern, that our souls, which are capable of tending upward and were designed to do so, might not be held groveling below by too much of earthy weight upon them : That they should not be hindred from acting worthy of their spiritual and excellent nature, by too much indulgence of the body. One of our principal cares, while we dwell in body, should be, that our minds may be preserved free for their own most worthy employments.

5. The instances mentioned, whereby our minds are eminently in danger of being overcharged. And they are of *two* sorts.

One is, the inordinate gratifications of the appetite by intemperance. Lest your hearts be overcharged *with surfeiting and drunkenness* ; that is, by the immoderate use either of meats or drinks ; making more free with either, than is consistent with the proper place of the body, namely, to be under the direction and command of the soul.

The other is, immoderate *cares* about the concerns of *this life*. The mind may be as much indisposed and unfitted for regular acting, and for attending to our principal interest, by too great a variety of worldly cares, or by too intense anxiety about them, as even by surfeiting and drunkenness. The sober actings of reason about our principal interests, may be as much disturbed by the one as by the other.

6. The



6. The extent, in which this caution is prescribed. *Lest at any time ye be so overcharged.*

It is worst of all to have this for the case of our souls in customary and habitual practice; but that is not all which we are to provide against: We should be on our guard against every particular discomposure either by worldly appetites or cares; for every such instance makes a man a transgressor, and is not a little detrimental to his soul.

This addition also may intimate, that they who think themselves best fortified against such disorders, or to have little temptation to them, yet may at some time or other be surprized, if they take not heed to themselves. Who could be imagined to have less occasion for a caution against intemperance, than these Disciples of Christ, who by their constant attendance on their Master were accustomed to a very regular way of living? Or whom should one think less in danger of immoderate cares, than plain fishermen, who had little to care for, except to keep their nets in order? Yet Christ saw it proper to admonish them, lest at some time they might be led by temptation to those evils, of which they might have no apprehension at present that they were in any danger. And the same caution we should all take to our selves.

7. The particular motive, by which Christ awakened his Disciples to this care and caution. *Take heed, lest your hearts be overcharged,*

charged, —and so that day come upon you unawares.

He had in the context acquainted his Disciples with the fore destruction, which was coming upon the *Jewish* temple and nation ; one of the severest judgments ever inflicted by God in this world. And in the text, he calls his Disciples to be very vigilant, that they might not miscarry in so dreadful a calamity, by indulging themselves in excess and luxury, or drowning their thoughts in worldly cares. Either of these would lead them to forget that awful season, though they were fore-warned of it, and hinder their preparation for it ; and indeed be a very unsuitable frame to be found in, when such judgments should come.

But though Christ's warning to his Disciples of that day was with a particular view to that national judgment upon the *Jews* ; yet, as that was a type of the last judgment approaching to us all, we are equally obliged to attend to the same caution in prospect of death and the future judgment, lest those days come upon us at unawares. *Mark* tells us, that when Christ had upon this occasion called his Disciples to watchfulness in general, he then actually extended it to all, *Mark* xiii. 37. *And what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch.* And that particular part of watchfulness contained in the text, must be understood in the same latitude.

I intend upon this text to discourse only of the head of intemperance. Immoderate cares will

will come under consideration in the next branch of my general subject, *Christian contentment*. I am now to prosecute this truth,

*That Christians are strongly obliged to maintain a strict guard against intemperance.*

Where I shall 1<sup>st</sup>, Shew, what is to be accounted intemperance. And 2<sup>dly</sup>, The obligations that lie upon Christians to keep a strict guard against it.

I. What is to be accounted intemperance.

And here I doubt not but you will easily apprehend, that I am not enquiring only after the grossest acts of this vice, such as justly expose a man to the common censure of all that see him, or to be pointed at in the streets for a glutton or a drunkard : But also after all that, which a man judging of himself impartially by the rules of reason and Scripture, and as in the sight of God, will have ground to account a criminal excess in this matter, though other people should have no foundation to pass a censure upon him.

Now I know not a more comprehensive rule of judgment in this case, than that which is intimated in the text. All such use of bodily provisions, whereby *the heart is overcharged*, or the mind is indisposed for its regular acts, or rendred any way less fit for acting as a rational and a religious agent, this is in proportion a faulty excess. And by this rule, beside the gross acts of intemperance, conscience may tell us, that every one of the following instances



instances infringe upon the grace of temperance.

1. All such use of meats and drinks, as indisposes the body to be at the service of the soul. The body was designed by our Creator to be the minister of the soul, and in a readiness to execute the orders of the higher powers: And the provisions given for our sustenance, are intended by the blessing of God with them to maintain the body in such a state. Whatever therefore we find prejudicial to our health, or that ordinarily has the effect to make our bodies heavy, sluggish and unactive; whether it be some particular kinds of food or liquor, or such a proportion and quantity of any; certainly ought to be abstained from, because we find them to disorder the just temperature of the body, and so to lessen its fitness to serve our minds. Indeed we can hardly judge of this one for another; for that is eminently fit to nourish and refresh some constitutions, which is most prejudicial to others; and some require such a quantity of sustenance to preserve their bodies in a regular and a vigorous state, as would quite disorder and unfit others for their duty. But most people may, if they please, judge of this for themselves: and temperance obliges every man, upon the best observation he can make of himself, ordinarily to abstain from those supports of life, for quality or for quantity, which he finds a disservice, instead of an advantage, to the good state of his body. If our bodies are rendered unserviceable,

able, either in whole or in part, by the providence of God without our own fault, we cannot help that; it is our affliction, and not our sin. But if we should knowingly disable our selves, we not only sin against our own bodies, but our own souls too. And indeed we are so many ways liable to disorders which we cannot help, that we have no need to increase them by our own follies.

2. Such ways of living, as are above what our worldly circumstances will admit, may justly be esteemed intemperance. High living, above people's condition and estate, either in the daintiness of their provisions or the plenty of them, is intemperance in *them*, though it may not deserve to be so accounted in those of better circumstances. It is going beyond the mean, which they should fix to themselves, and is too often the occasion of great injuries done to their neighbour: And, which brings it under the rule of the text, it unnecessarily overcharges their hearts, with care how to extricate themselves out of difficulties which were entirely owing to their own prodigality.

3. Such an application to indulge the appetite, as robs men of much of their time, not only frequently makes men to suffer in their secular affairs, but wrongs their souls too. Tho' reason should not be disturbed, nor health impaired; though the head should be *strong to drink wine*, and the estate able to bear it; yet this alone is a breach upon temperance, to *tarry long at the wine*, Prov. xxiii. 30. For it makes

makes a business of that, which ought to be no more than a refreshment, and a preparation for business. Especially, if by this means men keep such unseasonable hours at home, that either family-worship or their secret devotions are shut out, or they or their families are already become so drowsy and indisposed, that they can at best only do the work of the Lord negligently: When this is the case, the spiritual interests of themselves and of theirs is greatly obstructed.

4. All such gratifications of appetite, as disturb and lessen, though they do not entirely take away, the exercise of reason. The only commendable use of outward refreshments, is, either to support the body in its daily necessities, or to recruit and refresh the animal spirits when dull and heavy; that so the mind, which is nearly allied to the body in which it dwells, and apt to share in all its indispositions, may become fitter for the service of God and man. All compliances with appetite thus far, are not only lawful, but praise-worthy. But every step we go knowingly beyond this, is faulty. I wish this charge may not extend too far among those who pretend to sobriety. If you cannot allow your selves intirely to dethrone reason, and to transform the man into a beast, as the open drunkard does; if other people cannot charge you with transgressing the bounds of temperance, or discover any alteration in you for the worse; yet are you never conscious to your selves, that you suffer



reason to be muddled, and your thoughts to be more confused, instead of being more free? that though you have not lost the use of your better powers, yet you cannot use them so well as at other times? That you are neither equally fit for useful conversation, nor for the service of God, nor for application to your proper business? If this should be your case, tho' the guilt of it comes not up to the more notorious and scandalous instances of intemperance; yet surely conscience can hardly fail to admonish you in serious hours, that it is amiss. And if such a practice as this should be frequent and habitual with you, I cannot but apprehend it more heinous in the sight of God, than a single act of the grossest intemperance, into which a man is surprised quite contrary to his usual character.

5. All such use of provisions for the body, as is known usually to excite criminal and impure inclinations. Either such kinds of provision, as people have experienced to have such an effect upon themselves; or such a measure and quantity. Certainly, where this is found to be the case, it is not consistent with temperance, to take the same freedom in the use of those provisions, as of others; or as other people may do in the use of the same things without danger, because they find no such effect from them. This every man, who tenders his own soul and the maintenance of his purity, stands obliged to by the general precept, *not to*

H

*make*

*make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, Rom. xiii. 14.*

6. Such studied and customary gratifications of appetite, as tend to settle the spirit in a sensual frame, or a strong turn and addictedness toward bodily satisfactions, should not be esteemed harmless things by a Christian. *The carnal mind is enmity against God*, and finds a christian work for conflict all his days; and while he feeds his body, it should be his endeavour as little as may be to feed that. This makes frequent and high feasting, though it should not be attended with any of the bad consequences already mentioned, yet to be inexpedient and dangerous for most people. Though all feasting is not unlawful, as I shall have occasion to shew presently; yet I doubt there are very few, who make a frequent practice of it, who, like the rich man in the parable, *fare sumptuously almost every day, Luke xvi. 19.* but must own, if conscience may speak freely, that they put their minds out of frame, give too strong a bent to sensible good, and abate the edge of their desire and delight with reference to spiritual and eternal blessings. Now whatever hath that effect, is so far an enemy, and should not be indulged by a man that values the prosperity of his soul.

II. I proceed to shew the obligations, which lye upon Christians, to maintain a strict guard against intemperance.

I

1. The

1. The Gospel recommends temperance as a matter of great importance in Christianity. We have many precepts about it. As our Lord and Master here strongly enjoins it, so the Apostle; *Be not filled with wine*, Eph. v. 18. It is inculcated upon us from the clear light of the Gospel which we enjoy, *Rom. xiii. 13. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness*, 1 Thess. v. 5,—8. *Ye are all the children of the light, and the children of the day: We are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch, and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day, be sober.* When the Apostle mentions it as a common observation even concerning the heathen world, that those among them, who were drunken, were drunken in the night; it reflects the greatest shame upon the present degenerate manners of too many in christian lands, who are not ashamed to be disordered at noon-day, as well as in the noon-day light of the Gospel. The excessive indulgence of appetite in the primitive times is spoken of, as the character of people before their conversion, but which they were under the clearest engagements to change upon their entertaining the Gospel, 1 Pet. iv. 3. *The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abomin-*



*able idolatries.* These sensualities were chiefly practised by them, as attendants of the prophane and impure festivals of their false Gods: And therefore when they turned to God from idols, they should drop all these sinful indulgences also. For *the grace of God, which hath now appeared to all men, teaches us* in the first place *to live soberly*, Tit. ii. 11, 12. *Drunkenness and revellings are works of the flesh*, Gal. v. 21. which therefore *they that are Christ's have crucified*, ver. 24. Therefore the drunkard is to be excluded from christian communion, 1 Cor. v. 11. *I have written to you, if any one that is called a brother be—a drunkard, —with such a one, no not to eat.* It is observable, that the sacred historian intimates temperance to be an eminent part of the doctrine of the Gospel, when he tells us, *Acts xxiv. 24. that Felix heard Paul concerning the faith in Christ.* And what was that? We have an account of no more of his discourse upon this subject, but that *he reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*, ver 25. the Apostle chusing out those parts of the christian doctrine for his discourse with *Felix*, which were most suitable to his sins and circumstances.

2. We have lively representations in the word of God, of the danger and mischief of intemperance.

We are put in mind of those bad effects for this world, which so often follow it. The ruin of health and estate; the quarrels and  
contentions

contentions it so often excites to the prejudice of others, and often to men's own destruction. That *the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty*, Prov. xxiii. 21. *Who hath wo? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixt wine*, ver, 29, 30.

It is big with innumerable other sins. The parent especially of impurities. *Be not filled with wine, wherein is excess*, or unbridled dissolution of manners. It is mentioned as one fruit of tarrying long at the wine, Prov. xxiii. 33. *Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things*. It often prompts to do others the most extravagant injuries: And tho' in human courts of judicature it is often admitted for a plea in abatement of such crimes, that a man was disordered with liquor when he did them; yet I very much doubt, how far they will be allowed at God's tribunal for an extenuation, as long as men were forewarned of such consequences, as possible and probable to insue upon intemperance, and were cautioned against it from that consideration.

It is eminently of a hardning nature, and tends to make conscience insensible and stupified. *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine take away the heart*, Hos. iv. 11. It makes men *forget the law* of God, Prov. xxxi. 5. They are not only unteachable, while in an

act of intemperance ; but commonly frequent acts fear the conscience, and render them unapt for impression even at other times.

And, as the fruit of all, without solemn repentance, it will certainly exclude from the kingdom of God, 1 Cor. vi. 10. This quickened holy *Paul* to the utmost guard and caution over his bodily appetites, 1 Cor. ix. 27. *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.*

3. The bounty and goodness of God, in granting us the comforts of life, and leave to use them as far as is for our real good and safety, is an argument to gratitude not to abuse his favour.

*He gives us all things richly to enjoy,* 1 Tim. vi. 17. And shall we imploy the fruits of his rich beneficence to his dishonour and to our own hurt? How justly then may he resume his own forfeited gifts? *take away his corn in the time thereof, and his wine in the season thereof?* as he threatned to do to *Israel*, *Hos.* ii. 9.

He allows us not only the necessaries of life, but all reasonable conveniences, which we can fairly come by : A vast variety of creatures for our food, and *wine* in its season to *make glad the heart*, *Psal.* civ. 15. He does not confine us to the mere supply of the necessities of nature, but allows a freer use of his creatures in proper time and measure. All  
*feasting*



*feasting* is not forbidden. There were sacred feasts of divine appointment under the law, wherein the people were to rejoyce before the Lord every year, and to partake of the bounties of providence with a sober freedom. And there were feasts among good men in those times upon civil occasions; as *Lot's*, when he entertained the Angels at unawares, and *Abraham's* at the weaning of *Isaac*. We find the Lord Jesus himself countenancing a marriage-feast with his presence, and by working a miracle to supply their want of wine, in *Joh. ii.* Feasting therefore is not unlawful in it self, when it is managed in the fear of God, with sobriety, and in due time and place. All that God forbids us, is to unman our selves, and to do our souls a prejudice.

Besides this, under the Gospel our charter is enlarged from what it was under the law; all the ceremonial distinction of meats being abolished, and our liberty by that means extended to a greater variety. Therefore an intemperate abuse of our liberty to licentiousness, must be more criminal under the Gospel; when we are taught, that *God hath created all sorts of meats to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth; for every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; being sanctified by the word of God and prayer,* 1 Tim. iv. 3, — 5. That is, being warranted to use it by the word of God, if we do not forget to acknowledge God in it by prayer and

praise. Now how ungrateful shall we be, if we cannot satisfy our selves with the regular use of so large a supply? Like our first parents, who could not be content without the forbidden fruit, though they were allowed the use of every other tree in the garden.

4. The Gospel directs us to a better use of our superfluities, which will redound very much to our own advantage: That is, to relieve the necessitous with what we can spare our selves: And this enforced with a declaration of the high honour which our Master will put upon such services, *Matth. xxv. 35. I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink, &c.* For, as in *ver. 40. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* And shall we ruin our souls by an intemperate use of those things, with which we might lay up a good security for the time to come?

5. The example of Christ in this matter lays a strong ingagement upon Christians. He was not indeed, as he takes notice himself, *Matth. xi. 18, 19. like John the Baptist, who came neither eating nor drinking*, that is, not as other men do, but using a very spare and peculiar diet. But Christ *came eating and drinking*, that is, using such a diet as other sober people were wont to do, and conversing freely with all sorts for their good. His malicious enemies indeed called him for this *a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend*

*friend of publicans and sinners*: But most injuriously. As he was designed for a common example, he was the fitter for it by living in the common manner, as far as innocence would allow: And so he did, but never exceeded the bounds of strict regulation. He was sometimes at feasts; and thereby teaches us, that not only to support, but moderately to delight the body by eating and drinking, is not at all times unseemly for a Christian: But then he maintained strict sobriety; and spent not such seasons in mere vanity and levity, but pursued his general end of doing good, especially to the souls of men; as we have a remarkable instance in the profitable instructions which he took occasion to deliver, when he was present at an entertainment upon the invitation of a Pharisee, *Luke xiv*. He did not make feasts his ordinary choice; but commonly lived upon plain provisions; and ever by his example recommended to his Disciples, what he prescribes in the text by his doctrine, never to have his heart overcharged or hindred in his work by the refreshments of the body.

6. Intemperance will put us into the worst posture for Christ's coming to death and judgment. Who would not be afraid and ashamed to meet him in such an act of sin? And when we have such great events before us, and the time of them is ever uncertain, this thought should always be an effectual restraint from irregular indulgencies. *The old world,*



world, Christ tells us, *were eating and drinking*, that is, luxuriously, *till the flood came*, and swept them away, *Matth. xxiii. 38*. Oh the dreadful surprize! And so he intimates it will be with many at his own coming; *who shall say in their hearts, the Lord delayeth his coming*, and so imbolden themselves to *eat and drink with the drunken*, ver. 48, 49. But surely we should tremble at the thought of being found in the number, considering what follows, ver. 50, 51. *The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not ware of; and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. Intemperance is in it self one of the worst preparations to bid him welcome; and at the same time it hinders men in every other branch of preparation; it induces them to put the evil day far from them, till it come at unawares.

Be persuaded then, as Christ exhorts, to *take heed to your selves* in this matter, lest at any time you should exceed proper bounds in the indulgence of appetite. Many in this city are in peculiar danger, by the frequent occasions of feasting in the city-companies, as well as in their own and their friends houses, and especially \* at this season of leisure and more customary freedoms. I believe you

\* This was preached Dec. 30. 1722.

would

would find it your wisdom at all times to attend to the following directions.

Maintain a fixed detestation of intemperance, even the lowest degrees of it. As a thing unworthy of the dignity of your natures, vastly prejudicial to the interests of soul and body, highly displeasing to God, and peculiarly aggravated by the christian light and privileges you enjoy.

Avoid as much as you can the society of the intemperate, at least make them not your chosen companions, *Prov. xxiii. 20. Be not amongst wine-bibbers, amongst riotous eaters of flesh.* Bad company in this, as in all other cases, is most pernicious; it leads people by degrees, in compliance, to evils of which once they never thought. Scarce any are led at first by themselves to intemperance, but by some evil companions.

Allow not your selves to proceed to the utmost bounds of things lawful. There is but a step between that and being transgressors, in this as well as other matters; and the transition is easy, and very likely to be made at one time or other, if we often venture to a precipice.

When you fall into the way of that which you know to be insnaring, be peculiarly on your guard. That is the meaning of the direction, *Prov. xxiii. 2. Put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.* A man would not be eager of the richest dainties with a knife at his throat: So when we are aware of peculiar temptation, we should represent

represent it to our selves to awaken fear of transgressing, lest our *table should become our snare*. And in *ver. 31. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth it self a-right*. If you know appetite is apt to be too hard for you, you need not call in imagination to its assistance.

Take heed of giving way to the beginnings of intemperance. It insensibly steals on to higher degrees, and grows upon those who give it entrance. Sad instances I believe may be recollected, within the knowledge of most, of persons once in appearance of the strictest sobriety and regularity, who from small beginnings, which were not restrained at first, have sunk into the most perfect sottishness and sensuality, and been entirely lost to God, the world, and themselves. Intemperance eats like a canker, and too often increases with age. Which should make young people especially very cautious of the least degrees of it.

And especially see, that you keep up in your souls the life and power of religion; that your time and thoughts be well employed, that you may not be under the temptation of having recourse to sensual indulgences to pass away your time. *Be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation,* 1 Thess. v. 8. Making use of your faith and  
love



love and hope to fortify you against every allurements to intemperance. And *be filled with the Spirit* : For if ye walk in the Spirit, attending to and following his gracious influences, ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh, Gal. v. 16.

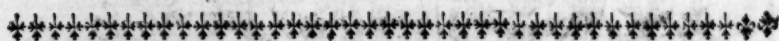




## SERMON VI.



### Christian Contentment.



PHIL. IV. 11. the later part.

— *I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*



**T** is a considerable branch of the duty, which we owe to God and to our selves, to have our affection to present enjoyments so moderated, that whether we have them or want them, whether we have a larger or a less share in them, we may yet enjoy

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 111

enjoy God and our selves: This is the contentment, which the Apostle could say in the text that he had attained. And a great thing it was, even for an excellent saint to be able to say so.

He let the *Philippians* know, in ver. 10. with what pleasure he received their kind contribution for the relief of his necessities. But then he was careful to acquaint them, that he meant not by this to intimate, that he had been discontented before at the straitness of his circumstances, ver. 11. *Not that I speak in respect of want: I can undergo even that, and yet be tolerably easy. For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.* “My mind can be competently  
“suited to my condition, if my condition  
“happen not in all respects to be suited to  
“my mind.

This is a very eminent part of the christian temper, wherein we should all aspire to be able to say the same thing with the blessed Apostle. And in the prosecution of the subject, I would 1<sup>st</sup>, Explain this disposition of mind: And 2<sup>dly</sup> shew, how it may be learned.

I. This disposition of mind is to be explained: *To be content, in whatsoever state we are.*

I have already hinted, that the Apostle only means this with reference to any sort of outward condition for this world. That is  
the



the proper province for contentment. It would ill become a man to say ; “ In what-  
 “ ever state *my soul* is, whether it be under  
 “ the reign of sin or of grace, whether it be  
 “ in a state of acceptance with God or un-  
 “ der his wrath, yet I am content.” This is real-  
 ly the temper of too many thoughtless sin-  
 ners : But it is very far from being com-  
 mendable. All God’s calls and warnings are  
 designed to awaken them out of this security ;  
 that they may never rest contented, till they  
 are in a safe state for eternity. Nor would  
 it be much more proper for a good man to  
 say ; “ I am content with the degrees of con-  
 “ formity to God and of victory over my ir-  
 “ regular inclinations, which are already ob-  
 “ tained.” It is certain *St. Paul* was of quite  
 another frame, as he declares in this same  
 epistle, chap. iii. 13, 14. *Forgetting the things  
 which are behind, and reaching forth unto  
 those things which are before, I press to-  
 wards the mark.* He means no more in the  
 text but this, that he was prepared to exercise  
 contentment, whether he was in a high or a  
 low condition in this world.

But what is this *contentment* in every  
 state ?

The word here used, *αὐτάρκης εἶναι*, and  
*αὐταρκεία*, which is used in another place for  
 contentment, strictly imports a *self-sufficiency*.  
 Which can by no means be understood,  
 when applied to any creature, in separation  
 from God, in whom all our springs are :

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 113

But it imports a tranquillity of mind, which does not absolutely depend upon the things of the world; but that whatever our outward condition is, our minds can have a foundation for rest and composure.

It would run too high for Christian contentment, to take a full satisfaction in any earthly state; to take up our rest in it, tho' it should be the best and most advantageous to our outward man; so as to have no lively desires after a better state; but to be ready to say, it is good to be here, *I would live here always*, if I might have my option. The frame here recommended, is not to be content with any state upon earth as our portion. St. Paul in the 3<sup>d</sup> chapter of this epistle describes men of that character, who so *mind* and affect *earthly things*, as *enemies of the cross of Christ*; and in opposition to them gives it as the character of himself and other Christians; *Our conversation is in heaven*, ver. 19, 20.

On the other hand, it is not inconsistent with the grace of contentment, to have a sense of any thing ungrateful or uneasy in our present lot. To be without that, would be stupidity, and not contentment. Nor will every desire, or regular endeavour to better our outward circumstances, be an argument of discontent. Such desires are the foundation of diligence and industry in men's callings, which serves so many good purposes in the world: And God himself encourages men,

I by

by temporal promises to diligence, to make the improvement of their worldly condition a subordinate end of their labours.

But true christian contentment with our state and lot, comprehends in it such things as these.

1. That our desires of worldly good are low and moderate. That we are not eager after much, nor *seek great things for our selves*; but that our desires be reduced within the bounds of necessity and reasonable convenience, or at least are not hot and impetuous after more. To this the Apostle exhorts, *1 Tim. vi. 8. Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.* That is, let us be able to acquiesce and be easy, tho' we should be allowed no more. We find *Jacob* forming his desires with such moderation, at his setting out in the world, and when he was to enter upon a journey of some length and distance from his father's house: He asked not riches and grandeur, but that *God would give him bread to eat, and raiment to put on, Gen. xxviii. 20.* And it will be the wisdom and the happiness of other young people to set out in the world, without mounting their desires very high; at least with a resolution to be easy, tho' they should be able to compass no more than a subsistence. A man that cannot be easy with that, knows not in truth what would make him easy; for covetousness is insatiable. We see people arriving at one enjoyment after another, which

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 115

which once seemed the top of their ambition; and yet so far from contentment, that their desires grow faster than their substance; and they are as eager to improve a good estate when they are become masters of it, as if they were still drudging for food and raiment. Christ warns us against this sort of covetousness, which consists in insatiable desires, *Luke xii. 15. Take heed and beware of covetousness; for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* In the parable, which immediately succeeds this caution, the rich fool, whom Christ describes and blames, is charged with no injustice or evil practices, but only with insatiable desires of abundance, and too intense a concern to lay up goods for many years. The Apostle exhorts the *Hebrews*, *Heb. xiii. 15. Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: τοῖς παρῶν, present things.* Till we arrive at such a temper, that we can be content and easy with what we have at present, covetousness is predominant; and the same principle will keep us uneasy in any future circumstances, when they may become present.

2. That in all our views of bettering our worldly condition, we indulge not immoderate cares. A prudent care of our affairs becomes us as reasonable creatures and as Christians. But a contented mind will not allow us to overdo herein. And we may over-



do, either by engaging in a greater variety of cares, than we can manage with composure of mind, and in consistence with our other duties; or by suffering any particular cares to run out into anxiety.

Some, from their eager desire of gain, drown themselves in such a variety and hurry of business, as is beyond their capacity and head to manage. Such a conduct generally defeats its own end, and issues in disappointment and loss for this world: But especially it is prejudicial to men's souls; either not leaving them reasonable time to attend to their better interests; or following them into their reading and hearing and praying, so that they cannot perform them without great distraction of thought; or presently wearing off any good impression made upon their spirits. Our Saviour cautions his Disciples against this, as well as intemperance, *Luke xxi. 34. Take heed to your selves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.* And if it concerns us to take heed, lest this should be the case *at any time*, what must be the mischief and danger of a perpetual hurry of worldly business? when men launch out beyond their depth, and possibly cannot retreat and disengage themselves when they will?

Others, tho' they may not enter upon an undue multiplicity of business, yet are intemperately solicitous about that, in which they do engage;

engage; that is, about the issue and success of their projects and endeavours. They are not satisfied with having acted the proper and prudent part incumbent on them, and then to leave the event to God; but torment and rack their minds about that which is not in their own power. This is that sort of *taking thought for the morrow*, against which our Saviour cautions, *Mat. vi. 34.* And that sinful *carefulness*, from which the Apostle exhorts us, *Phil. iv. 6. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.* Anxiety is an evident mark of discontent, and will be a certain hindrance to contentment in any condition, as long as it is indulged.

3. That whatever our present condition be, we cheerfully submit to the providence of God in it. In opposition to all murmuring complaints of him, tho' our lot should be strait and uneasy. Christian contentment essentially includes in it a respect to divine providence in all our circumstances, and a humble acquiescence in the disposals of it. If we *fret against the Lord*, because things are not according to our mind, we fly in the face of the great governour of the world; and instead of helping our selves, shall vastly increase our difficulty by making him our enemy. But when we have uprightly done our part, whatever the event be, it becomes us to say with *Eli, 1 Sam. iii. 18. It is the Lord, let him*

*do what seemeth him good.* If any comfort, which may appear desirable in it self, is denied us, there should be a placid submission upon the foot of what *Jacob* told *Rachel*, when she was discontented for want of children, *Gen. xxx. 2. God hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb.* It was a truth, which became a better mouth than that of *Balak*, when he said to *Balaam*, *Num. xxiv. 11. The Lord hath kept thee back from honour:* And it should be a quieting thought to good men, whenever they are disappointed in such expectations. If you have not that success by an industrious application to business, as others around you have; it should be a thought present with you, *The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up,* 1 Sam. ii. 7. Contentment, as a grace, includes in it this regard to God.

4. That we are so easy with our own lot, as not to envy others, who may be in more prosperous circumstances. Envy is an infallible mark of discontent. Duty to God and charity to our neighbour would induce us to take pleasure in the welfare of others, whether we immediately share in it or not. A contented mind upon the principles of religion, would naturally fall into such reflections as these, if we see other men possessed of a larger affluence of comforts than we; "The love or hatred of God are not known by such things as these. If our more prosperous neighbours should be bad men, their  
riches

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 119

“ *riches may be to their hurt, and the prof-*  
“ *perity of fools may destroy them.* If they  
“ be good men, God, who knows what is  
“ best for every one, may know it safer for  
“ them to be intrusted with such comforts,  
“ than it would be for us; that they may be  
“ great mercies to them, and yet would prove  
“ too strong temptations for us. Or, if that  
“ should not be the case, yet *shall not God*  
“ *do what he will with his own?* Or, *shall*  
“ *my eye be evil against my neighbour, be-*  
“ *cause God is good to him? Mat. xx. 15.*”  
As *charity*, so contentment *envieth not.*

5. That we are so far satisfied with our present condition, whatever it be, that we will not use any unlawful means to better it. It is a certain sign, that our minds are not brought down to the pleasure of God in our lot, if we can allow our selves to go out of God's way in any instance to change it. He, that is possessed of the grace of contentment, will not allow himself, whatever inconveniences may accrue to his body, to venture upon the displeasure of God and the violation of his conscience to remove them. He cannot find in his heart to mend his circumstances by any acts of injustice, or fraud, or violence, or by making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. The Apostle opposes to *contentment* such a disposition that men *will be rich*, 1 Tim. vi. 8, 9, 10. They *will be so* at all adventures, whatever it costs them, tho' they should sacrifice principle and



religion and honour to the obtaining of their end. We are told particularly the mischievous effects of such a resolute determination in this case. *They, that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money, such a love of money, or covetousness is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* When the Roman soldiers came to *John the Baptist*, among others that were struck with the novelty of his preaching and baptism, and asked him, *And what shall we do?* *John* wisely addressed to them suitable to their temptations with these advices, *Luke iii. 14. Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.* The soldiers were pinched with their narrow allowance, and too apt to injure other people to make up that defect, either by using violence or false accusations, that they might reap the plunder of other men's goods. *John* therefore particularly cautions them against these ill ways of providing for themselves; and exhorts them to contentment with the allowance of their station, as an effectual preservation against all such irregular courses.

6. That we make the best of our condition, whatever it may be. We are too prone to cast our eye only upon the dark side of our condition. But a contented man will impartially

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 121

tially survey all the circumstances of his lot; and that will soon enable him to discern many things fit to alleviate and balance his uneasinesses. He will reflect in such a way as this.— “ If I have not so large a share as  
“ some others, yet have I not enough to carry me thro’ the world? If I have not a large  
“ provision made for time to come, yet hath  
“ not God hitherto given me my daily  
“ bread, and what occasion have I to distrust  
“ him for the future? If I have not enough  
“ to gratify every random inclination, yet  
“ have I not sufficient to supply real wants?  
“ If I am denied some things which I desire, yet is not this the case of the great  
“ and of the most abounding? If others  
“ prosper in the world more than I, yet are  
“ not some more distressed? If I live more  
“ directly upon providence, yet have not  
“ goodness and mercy followed me all my  
“ past days? and why should I doubt, but  
“ that in the way of duty they will follow me *all the days of my life*? If I have  
“ not every thing I wish for, yet have I not  
“ unspeakably more than I deserve?” A disposition to contentment readily cherishes itself with such considerations. But it will be proper farther to shew,—

II. How such a frame is to be learned.

The Apostle declares, that he had learned this. In our present depraved state, it is not a temper to which we are naturally disposed:

Whether we look into our own hearts, or observe the world about us, we may easily perceive this. Whoever is possessed of it, is a learner, before he attains it. And without doubt the Apostle means, that he learned it in the school of Christ; by laying to heart the principles inculcated by Christianity, which were sufficient to animate such a temper; by improving every other advantage fit to form him to it; and by the gracious teaching of the divine Spirit, making all successful. Thus he learned it gradually, and became from time to time a better proficient. So may, so ought we to arrive at such a temper.

I. Christianity sets in view the most solid principles of contentment, and the strongest motives to it. Such as,

The *perfections* of the blessed God, whose providence disposes our lot. He is *just* and *righteous* in all his proceedings. As a perfect being, and *the judge of all the earth*, he cannot but *do right*. If we firmly believe this, tho' we should not be able to account for some particular administrations, yet we shall readily impute that to our own ignorance and narrow views, rather than call in question so indisputable a principle: Whatever occurs, we shall *ascribe righteousness to our Maker*, Job xxxvi. 3. His almighty *power* is another reason to silence every murmur; for what advantage can it be to repine at our lot, when we are intirely in his hand? who *doth whatever pleaseth him in the armies of heaven,*

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 123

heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, Dan. iv. 35. Nor is this absolute power in the hands of a malevolent and unkind being, but one of infinite *goodness*, who loves his creatures, and consults their good; and has unerring *wisdom*, to judge in every case and for every person what is best for them. We know not what is good for our selves in this life; we have often found already, that if we had had our own *desires*, it must have been in *anger*, and to our real prejudice. What reason therefore have we to be content, and even to rejoice, that *our times are in God's hands*? Christ, in his sermon upon the mount, strikes at the root of distrustful and discontented cares, by representing the *bounty* and the *wisdom* of providence: The bounty of it, as extending to the meanest creatures, to *the fowls of the air*, Mat. vi. 26. And the wisdom of it, in that *our heavenly Father knows what we need*, ver. 32.

The *relations*, in which we stand to God, still inforce the argument to contentment. As we are his creatures, we are rightfully at his dispose. *Wo to him, that strives with his Maker: Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth: shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou?* Isa. xlv. 9. We forget our condition and original, if we acquiesce not in the determinations of the author of our beings. This consideration, that all is derived from God, composed *Job*  
into



into a calm, *Job i. 21. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* If we consider our selves farther, as such who have offended him, and forfeited every benefit, even life it self; can there be any just reason for discontent, because we enjoy not all the comforts we can think of? It is grace, that we have any left. But especially, if we can justly hope, that we are his children in the most distinguishing sense, this may well reconcile us to any circumstances of our lot here. If we are brought into his family by Christ, so that he is our Father, our Friend and our God; we have a satisfying portion, how little soever we may enjoy of worldly good, and may justly say with *Jacob, Gen. xxxiii. 11. I have enough; or as it is in the Hebrew, I have all things:* For if God and Christ be ours, *all things are ours,* as far as God sees that they will conduce to our real interest, *1 Cor. iii. 21. Distress or famine or nakedness; height or depth, shall not separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The fulness and extent of the divine promises is a constant reason for contentment. These are breasts of consolation, from which we may draw refreshment in every state of life; they are either particularly suited to our circumstances, or more generally comprehend them. That one promise of *God's being with us,* might carry a Christian chearfully thro' life. Upon this principle the Apostle recommends  
con-

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 125

contentment, *Heb. xiii. 5.* *Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* In the most solitary or mean condition, we cannot be alone or destitute, if *the Father is with us.*

The various *mercies*, which actually attend us in every state, if they be observed and seriously meditated upon, will strongly oblige to contentment. We are never in so low and uneasy circumstances in this world, that there are no mixtures of mercy and favour. If we have not abundance, yet have we not necessities? *lack we any thing?* If we lose some dear relation, yet are not others left? If we have met with some disappointments, yet are we stripped of our all? Have we no instances of a lower and straiter condition than our own? Certainly we must be very ungrateful to God, to overlook the advantageous parts of our lot, because of some circumstances which we should not chuse.

The *shortness of our time* below, and the approaches of death, loudly speak the reasonableness of contentment with our present condition. A traveller will be contented on the road with the accommodations he meets with, tho' they should not be the best, upon the prospect that he is going home, where he shall have better; especially if he expects to be soon at home: So a Christian should be easy with his lot in his short pilgrimage thro' this world; which

which he knows is shorter compared with eternity, than the longest journey he can undertake compared with the rest of his life on earth. And especially, if we consider that we can carry nothing home with us, which will be of service beyond the grave, more than the poorest can. A consideration, by which the Apostle inforces contentment with a small allowance by the way, 1 *Tim.* vi. 7, 8. *We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And, or, therefore having food or raiment, let us be therewith content.*

If we look into the *eternal world* before us, the argument will gather farther strength. If we view the finished misery of sinners that have shot the gulph, who have not so much as a drop of water to cool their tongue; *Wherefore should a living man complain?* a man still among the living, and in the possession of some comforts, who yet is conscious that he deserves to have his lot with the other? On the other hand, if we can entertain hope of heaven as a state we are designed for, where every want shall be supplied, and where perfect unmixed happiness is ready for us; how unbecoming such expectants is it, to fret at our circumstances in the very short intervening passage?

Finally, the *folly* and *mischiefe* of discontent is fit to be represented to our minds, to fortify them against it. Fretting and uneasiness is not the way to amend our circumstances:

Which

Which is an argument suggested by our Saviour, *Mat. vi. 27. Which of you by taking thought, or anxious carefulness, can add one cubit to his stature?* The word we translate *stature*, signifies indifferently either *stature* or *age*; and accordingly we may understand Christ to intimate, that we cannot by our carefulness add either to the growth of our bodies, or to the length of our lives; and therefore we should, without anxious solicitude, rely upon God's providence in the way of ordinary industry, for what he sees convenient for us. Discontent is not a likely way to obtain the favour of providence for bettering our condition, nor will it fit us to take the more proper steps on our part toward the accomplishment of our desires. It rather provokes God to walk the more contrary to us, and discomposes our own minds, so as to render them less apt for any prudent endeavours. It increases every uneasiness, instead of lessening it. It adds the weight of guilt to any burthen. It obstructs our enjoyment of the mercies we have, and our thankfulness for them; and is often the parent of many great sins, which otherwise would be very remote from men's thoughts. And it is a great disparagement to our holy profession in the view of the world.

2. Christianity furnishes us with the brightest patterns of contentment. To inforce the precepts of it, and prevent our despair of attaining it.



Such a declaration as that in the text, is one of the most persuasive recommendations of the practice. The Apostle had learned this, and yet he was now in low and strait circumstances: He had learned to be content in any state, and he could say this, after he had passed thro' a great variety of difficulties, had been *in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness*, 2 Cor. xi. 27. We are to consider this Apostle of the Gentiles as set forth herein, as well as in his obtaining mercy at first, *for a pattern to them which should after believe.*

But especially the Lord Jesus is the great pattern of all his followers in this excellent grace. The Lord of Glory stooped to the lowest abasement: *Tho' he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor*; not only was found in fashion as a man, but appeared in the world from his cradle to his grave in a state of meanness; in his younger years he passed for a *carpenter's son*; and when he came abroad into his publick ministry, *had not a place of his own where to lay his head.* Yet thro' the whole of his course not one expression of discontent was heard: But his behaviour was perfectly suitable to one, that considered himself as come into the world to perform the work assigned him; and that was ready to leave it, as soon as that was finished. We should all look upon our selves in such a view, and look to the example of Jesus to excite us to be like-minded.

3. Christia-

3. Christianity directs us to the most effectual teacher, to make these considerations and helps successful for our actual learning the lesson of contentment: To impress the motives of the Gospel upon our hearts and consciences; and while we are beholding the amiableness of Christ's pattern, to *change us into the same image*. And this is the good Spirit of God. Who teaches like him? Under his influences *Paul* became such a proficient: And he is equally ready to perform his kind offices for us, if we desire his aids, and are heartily willing to learn of him.

### I N F E R E N C E S.

1. The present state should be considered by us as a state of learning. There are many important lessons, which we are all concerned to learn in Christ's school; this of contentment among the rest: And there will be constant room, while we are in the body, for learning every one of them better. The Apostle indeed in the text says, that he *had* already *learned* to be content: But when he had declared in this very epistle, that *he had not already attained*, that is, perfectly; we cannot understand him, that he was become such a proficient, as to have no room left for farther improvement; but only that he had attained this skill in a competent measure. They are truly commendable, who have made a proficiency above others, or above what they were themselves formerly in any christian excellence;

cellence; but they should be still aspiring to the highest form.

2. More depends upon our own spirits than upon our outward condition, in order to contentment. *Paul* could say, he had learned to be content, *in whatsoever state he was*. This was not, because he could chuse his condition, but because his spirit was so regulated by the grace of God, that he could be reconciled to any condition. Most people judge otherwise; they imagine they could be content and at rest, if they could obtain such a comfort which their hearts are now set upon, if they could arrive at an estate of such a size, as would supply their present wishes. Vain thought! If they are gratified in their present desire, a worldly mind unmortified will outgrow their acquisitions; new wants and new contrivances will start up, and they will be as far from satisfaction as at their setting out. A low condition, considered in it self, may seem to give the strongest temptations to discontent: But if we consult experience, we shall find the rich and the powerful as frequently strangers to an easy mind as those in a mean state of life. The reason is, their irregular inclinations and unsatiable desires are enlarged with their substance; and therefore all they have passes for nothing, because their own distempered appetites will not let them rest.

We have a lively instance of this in *Haman*: If his desires could have had any bounds, one would think he had all in possession that heart

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 131

heart could wish for. See how he reckons it up himself to his friends, *Esth.* v. 11, 12. *He told them of the glory of his riches:* He had amassed together vast treasures, and was enabled by that means to live in great splendor. *And the multitude of his children:* Many heap up riches, but have neither child nor brother to inherit them; but *Haman* had a multitude of his own descendants, no less than *ten sons*, whatever other children he had; so that he might have hopes that his house should continue for ever, and his dwelling-place to all generations. *And all the things, wherein the king had promoted him:* The several high offices, and stations of trust and honour, which he had conferred upon him. *And how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.* He was prime minister, took place of the greatest princes, who were natives of the country, and of the highest officers of the court, who all paid him the next honours to the sovereign himself. *Yea, says he, Esther the queen let no man come in with the king unto the banquet which she had prepared but my self; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king.* He thought himself to stand as high in the queen's favour as in the king's: And from the distinguishing marks of regard he had from both, and from the new invitation sent him for the next day, he had reason to apprehend that he was established in his high dignity. But in all this a-



agreeable situation of his affairs, is the man contented? No, he immediately adds, ver. 13. *Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.* Mordecai had denied him the respect and reverence which he expected, and this spoiled the enjoyment of all his delights. His haughty mind could not brook one man at court who would not cringe to him, so that he could not relish the obeisance paid him by all the rest; his riches, his children, his power, his dignities, all availed him just nothing.

This strange, but very striking instance is a full evidence, that the largest collection and the greatest variety of worldly good will not produce contentment; that a small uneasiness, the not having a single appetite or passion gratified, will take away the relish of what is agreeable in life, if such an appetite or passion is allowed to be headstrong; and therefore that no condition can make us happy, unless a foundation be laid for it in the due regulation of our own spirits.

3. Let us therefore labour to have our minds so formed, that they can be content and tolerably easy in any state of life. Let us endeavour to carry such a temper along with us, that we can comport with any condition and make the best of it; or else in truth there is no condition, which will not furnish occasions for discontent. The Apostle goes on thus to explain his attainment, ver. 12. *I know both how to be abased, and I*  
*know*

SER. VI. *Christian Contentment.* 133

*know how to abound; every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* Now what is this universal furniture for contentment through all the changes of life? It must consist of these ingredients: A low opinion of this world, and mortified affections to the things of it: A lively faith in the promised realities of the life to come: Comfortable hopes of our own title to the heavenly inheritance: And a hearty resignation to the disposal of our heavenly Father for our circumstances by the way. By means of these we shall enjoy a happy calm thro' every state, and without these we may be over-set in any.





## SERMON VII.



### Christian Patience.



H E B. X. 36.

*For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*



*P*atience is very near akin to the grace of *contentment*, which I have been last upon: And yet there is a difference between them. *Contentment* properly respects our worldly condition, only as it is supposed capable of rising higher, and as our possession of the good things of life is not complete.

SER. VII. *Christian Patience.* 135

pleat. Patience respects the *evils* of life, which we are actually feeling; or some future good, which we have ground to expect, but that is as yet delayed. And the Apostle in the text, compared with the context, represents Christians as needing patience in both these respects.

He reminds these converted *Hebrews*, to whom he wrote, how they had already been called to suffer for Christ; and how well they had acquitted themselves in the trial, *ver.* 32, 33, 34. *Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured* (the word signifies, *ye endured with patience*) *a great fight of afflictions: Partly while ye were made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in your selves that ye have in heaven a better and an induring substance.* But their warfare was not yet accomplished; and therefore he exhorts them to maintain the same temper, animated by the same hope, *ver.* 35. *Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.* “Quit not the  
 “patience, the courage and freedom you have  
 “used in maintaining your profession; for the  
 “rewards you expect, will make full amends  
 “for all the trials which may be yet behind, as  
 “well as for those already undergone.” And therefore stop not short of the prize: *For ye*  
K 4
*have*



*have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.* There is a promise to be received by Christians, which is sufficient to compensate the utmost sufferings and services they can pass thro' here. But this shall not be received, till after they have done the will of God: Till they have gone through their course of obedience to his preceptive will, and of submission to his providential will, for as long time as he sees meet to continue them by the way. And therefore every Christian has need of patience in order to this.

I shall discourse of the subject in the following method. 1<sup>st</sup>, Enquire into the nature of christian patience. 2<sup>dly</sup>, Shew the need and occasion, which a Christian has for it, from this consideration, that he is not to receive the promise, till after he hath done the will of God. And 3<sup>dly</sup>, Represent the way, to which Christianity directs us for supplying this need, or for furnishing us with the patience required.

I. The nature of christian patience is to be considered.

I have already suggested, that the province, wherein patience is to be exercised, is, either in bearing present inconveniences and evils; or in waiting for some future good, and especially in the Christian's case waiting for the future blessedness of heaven.

Two words are more especially used in the new Testament to express this temper. One is μακροθυμία, *a length of mind*. This our translators sometimes render *patience*, as in *Heb. vi. 12. Jam. v. 10.* and sometimes *long-suffering*, as *Rom. ii. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 6. Rom. ix. 22, &c.* It is directly opposed to *hastiness of spirit*. The other word, most frequently used for patience, is that in the text, ὑπομονή, *abiding constant under afflictions*; or, sustaining the evils which befall us, with perseverance in our duty, in expectation of the deliverance and recompence promised in due time.

Patience is not an insensibleness of present evils, or an indifference for future good. *No affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous.* Christ himself was sensible of his sufferings, and expressed his sense of them. Nor should we be coldly affected to the blessings, for which God has encouraged us to hope: That would be a reflection upon their excellence, or upon our own taste; and would make us negligent in endeavours to obtain them.

But christian patience is a disposition, that keeps us calm and composed in our frame, and steady in the practice of our duty, under the sense of our afflictions, or in the delay of our hopes.

The principal expressions of it may be reduced to these instances.

1. Patience secures the possession of our souls, in every circumstance that tends to discompose

compose our minds. Christ exhorts his Disciples, when he had foretold the sufferings and dangers to which they would be exposed, *Luk. xxi. 19. In patience possess ye your souls.* “Whatever you meet with, keep up the possession of your selves, let reason and grace maintain the ascendant, and shew your selves men.” This exhortation supposes what in fact we find too often true, that smart trials or the deferring of men’s hopes, are apt to make *their heart sick*, to master and inflave the mind; so that people are hardly their own men, but their violent affections and tumultuous passions run away with them. Patience is to guard the soul against this: To preserve it sedate and sober; that unreasonable passions and resentments may not boil up either against God or man; that inward peace upon the solid grounds of religion, may not be lost in the scuffle of passion, or clouded by events which have no connection with it; that we may not be so infatuated as to lose the enjoyment of the blessings we have, because of some evils we feel; and that we may still be able clearly to discern our present duty in any turns of providence. This is to possess our souls in any trial of patience; to continue in an even frame, and ward off all impressions which would ruffle our minds, or put us out of the temper becoming us as men and Christians.

2. Patience will prevent hasty and rash conclusions, either from present troubles or from the suspension of desired good. We are prone  
to

to make a hasty judgment of things from present appearances; against which patience will fortify. We are too ready to charge God foolishly; to call in question the truth of his promises, if he do not accomplish them in our way and time; or to suspect his mercy and goodness because of the trials which are made our lot: Like the desponding *Psalmist*, Psal. lxxvii. 7, 8, 9. *Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath he forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* In opposition to this, patience disposes to rest in God's certain declarations of his favour to the upright; and to suppress any such hasty surmises to the dishonour of God; as the same *Psalmist* did in ver. 10. *This is my infirmity.* Or, we may be apt in dark hours to entertain some hard thoughts of religion, when it exposes to suffering, and the recompences of it are considered as out of sight and future: But patience will fix us in this reckoning, *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*; and that the recompences in prospect are worth waiting and suffering for too. If we are ready to despond of success, when we think of the strength or subtlety of our enemies, the variety of our work, and our own weakness; patience will suppress every misgiving thought, and imbolden us to  
con-



conclude, that *he who hath delivered, and doth deliver, will yet deliver*; that he will keep us from falling, and fulfill in us the whole good-pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power, if we sincerely endeavour to finish well.

3. Patience will fortify against any unlawful methods for accomplishing our deliverance or desires. It is natural to all under burthens to cast about how they may help themselves, or to consult proper means to obtain what they wish for. Now it is the work of patience to restrain from any sinful expedient, which may seem to promise relief. *He that believeth, shall not make haste*, Isa. xxviii. 16. The patient man resolves rather to bear any trouble, than go out of God's way to ease himself: He will reckon it the same thing to have no way at all, and to have no lawful way of deliverance from his affliction. When the *Philistines* were coming against *Saul* with a formidable army, and his own people were much discouraged and afraid, he would not wait for deliverance in God's time and way, but he went himself and offered a burnt-offering, 1 Sam. xiii. 9. This was his impatience; and though he promised himself much from it, yet it cost him dear. If he had patiently staid a little longer, *God would have established his kingdom upon Israel for ever*. But for this hasty step God deprived both him and his family, ver. 13, 14. Patience will not suffer a man to apply to any doubtful course, much less to venture

SER. VII. *Christian Patience.* 141

ture upon any known sin to precipitate his release or satisfaction.

4. Patience disposes a man to go on in the way of his duty, whatever discouragement may arise from the pressure of his troubles or the deferring of his hopes. This is the most essential part of patience, to persevere in our proper work and our christian course, whatever weights and burthens attend us, whatever it may cost us, and though the success and benefit of our endeavours do not immediately insue. The impatient in such a case are apt to be *faint and weary in their minds*, to become remiss in their work, and tired out of their waiting frame by sharp and continued trials; if not wholly to give up in despondency. But *the righteous shall hold on his way*, Job xvii. 9. This is what the Apostle exhorts us to, *Heb. xii. 1. to run with patience the race that is set before us*; whatever difficulties it is attended with, and for as long time as our master, who has appointed it, sees meet to continue us in it.

These things may be sufficient to represent the general nature of patience. We shall have occasion to be more particular in the consideration of the *second* general head proposed, namely,

II. To shew the need and occasion, which a Christian has for the exercise of patience. The Apostle affirms of those, to whom he wrote, that *they had need of patience*: And  
whatever

whatever might be singular in their case, there is enough in the common case of all Christians, or for ought they know may be so, to make the same declaration to hold true of them all.

A Christian has need of patience, as well as of the other graces of the Spirit, in his way to heaven. This is one branch of the character of every heir of glory, as much as faith or love or any other part of the new nature. It is a part of the image of God in his saints. He is stiled *the God of patience*, Rom. xv. 5. He is long-suffering, and exercises much forbearance. Though his perfect blessedness admits not properly of his suffering any prejudice, yet he receives many affronts from sinful creatures, and notwithstanding them suspends the execution of his anger, and therein shews as it were a power over himself; as *Moses* elegantly expresses it in his prayer, *Numb. xiv. 17, 18. Let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long suffering, and of great mercy, &c.* As if he had said; Yet give another instance, how thou canst restrain thy just anger, by sparing again this provoking people. Now there must be some resemblance of our heavenly Father in all his children, in this as well as other representations of him: They must *properly* exercise a power over themselves to restrain their passions and keep possession of their souls, under the various providences of God. Hence *patience* is reckoned up as a branch of the godlike nature in us, *2 Pet. i. 6.* and *long suffering* is one of the

SER VII. *Christian Patience.* 143

the fruits of the Spirit, *Gal. v. 22.* and what all the *elect of God* are pressed to *put on*, *Col. iii. 12.*

Christians have need of patience, in common with the rest of their fellow-creatures. All have some exercises of patience in this life, and Christians share in the common lot. They are no more exempted than others, from the vanity and uncertainty of the present state. Pains and diseases, loss of friends, ingratitude, disappointments in their affairs, and all the various troubles to which man is born, fall to the lot of good and bad promiscuously. In these things *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, *Eccl. ix. 2.* And they must, as well as others, frequently continue expectants for a long time of many outward comforts and benefits they desire. And therefore they have need of patience, as well as others; and God would have them to be examples to the rest of the world, in the exercise of patience under the same circumstances with them.

Besides this, Christians, as such, have more need of patience than others: And the greater advances they make in the christian life, still so much the more occasion they have for it. *They often meet with peculiar exercises upon the score of their goodness:* Sufferings of one kind or other for the sake of Christ and a good conscience. Such is the temper of the world, that it seldom fails to hold true in some degree, that *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution*, *2 Tim. iii. 12.*

The



The Church is seldom long without open persecution; and when it enjoys what may comparatively be called *rest*, yet the number of those who are really religious is so disproportionate to the bad, that they generally meet with some ungrateful distinction from those, among whom they live; they can hardly escape reproach, if they are treated no worse. Now all such things are trials of patience, And *their disposition toward the promised blessedness, makes the deferring of that a trial peculiar to them.* Earthly minds are strangers to any exercise of patience in this case: If they might, they would live here always. But a Christian has fixed his portion in God, and he expects not his full happiness in him till he arrives at heaven, and therefore he prefers that world to this. And the higher advances he has made in knowledge and faith, and meetness and assurance, so much the more will the deferring of his blessedness be a trial of his patience.

Those Christians, who have exercised much patience already, yet still have need of it to the end of their lives. It is the scope of the text, as I observed at the beginning, to admonish those who were partakers of this grace, and had given instances of it, that still they had need of it: They had yet need of more patience, and room to acquit themselves better in farther trials.

But that, which I would a little more particularly insist upon, is the consideration which the Apostle intimates, upon account of which they

SER. VII. *Christian Patience.* 145

they had need of patience; *That, after they had done the will of God, they might receive the promise.* This gives us a lively representation, how necessary this grace is, in several views we may take of it.

1. A Christian has need of patience, to persist in doing the will of God, even in his ordinary course. The certain and known duty of a Christian in his way to heaven, independent of those particular circumstances which are made the lot of some, calls for a good measure of patience to do it well; for there is some difficulty and exercise in a christian course in the best state of things that this world will admit. Hence a *patient continuance in well-doing* is a character requisite to every Christian, *Rom. ii. 7.*

Many of the constant duties of the christian life are unavoidably a weariness to the flesh. Prayer and reading and hearing cannot be performed without pains: And patience is needful for that reason.

Indwelling sin is frequently making opposition, so that *when we would do good, evil is present with us*, *Rom. vii. 21.* This often occasions an uneasy struggle.

We must act contrary to the practice of the generality in many instances of duty. When the world is at the best, this is the case. If we would approve our selves to God and a good conscience, we must in some things be content to swim against the stream, to be singular, and *not conformed to the world*, *Rom. xii. 2.*

L

but

but rather by a contrary practice, with *Noah*, to condemn the world, Heb. xi. 7. This calls for patience.

In many cases we must proceed in the performance of duty, when we cannot discern the success of past endeavours. We must still go on striving after the mortification of sin, tho' it may appear to us as strong as ever: And persist in the use of means for the good of others under our care and influence, though they have hitherto been unsuccessful. This is a very considerable trial of christian patience: The chariot-wheels are very apt to drive heavily in such circumstances.

And in the advances of age, when natural strength and spirits abate, many branches of duty are necessarily more tedious and wearisome, as almost every action of life is; and yet they must not be given over.

2. A Christian hath need of patience, to persist in *bearing* the will of God and in doing his duty under it, when his course is peculiarly imbittered. For instance,

To bear the shock of *sudden* and *unexpected* trials, which are apt to over-set a man at once, and to produce hasty thoughts and unadvised words, both of God and man. *I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes*, Psal. xxxi. 22. *I said in my haste, all men are liars*, Psal. cxvi. 11. To suppress a tumult, and keep the mind in frame upon such an occasion, is a very great attainment. The patience of *Job* was remarkable upon this account.

To



SER. VII. *Christian Patience.* 147

To bear a *succession* of exercises, one after another, is still more. To have God's waves and billows to pass over us, and yet keep our heads above water, neither thinking him unkind, or unjust, or unfaithful, nor losing the use of reason and grace; is a noble firmness of mind. How illustrious was the composure of *Job*, when so many messengers of ill tidings came thick one upon another? While he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, yet he *fell down and worshipped, saying, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly,* Job i. 20,—22.

To bear the *long-continuance* of exercises. Many, who have behaved well upon the first attack, yet have been tired out by the length and tediousness of afflictions: They have lost the possession of themselves at last, after they had suppressed passion, and discontent, and hard thoughts for a considerable time; and have fallen into some indirect course for relief, to which they could not find in their hearts to listen at first. Though *tribulation* is sometimes so sanctified, that it worketh *patience*, *Rom. v. 3.* yet this is far from being its constant effect. But how glorious the example, when a man perseveres in patience through a long course of pain, or poverty, or reproach? There was this circumstance to magnify the patience of *Job*; though



at the same time he is an instance how strong a temptation the length of exercises is; since even patient *Job*, who began so gloriously, was occasionally transported into some sallies of impatience in the course of his trial.

To bear the hand of God, when he touches us in a most tender point. Not only in small trials, but in great and heavy afflictions. If life, suppose, be threatned. The malice of Satan would not be satisfied, when he saw *Job's* steadiness under his many calamities, without urging God to put him to this last trial; well knowing, that *skin for skin, yea all that a man hath, will he give for his life*, *Job* ii. 4. How hard to have the trial of our faith found unto praise in such a case? Or still to exercise patience, when God deprives us not only of things more remote from our hearts, but when he calls for our *Isaacs*? When he takes away our idols? Here men are apt to say, I could have born any thing but this.

To bear God's rod, when we cannot account for his reasons and ends in it. When *clouds and darkness are round about him*, yet to believe that *judgment is the habitation of his throne*; this is a hard, but a glorious display of patience. *Job* could say this, *Job* xxiii. 8,—11. *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: He hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. But he knoweth*

*knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.*

To bear sharp afflictions, when natural spirits are decayed. *The spirit of a man*, when lively, and well supported by the animal spirits, *will go a great way to sustain his infirmity*: But when *the spirit is wounded*, not only by guilt, but by weakness of body, sinking distresses, or the infirmities of age; how much harder are the amiable expressions of patience?

To bear affliction patiently, when an unlawful way of deliverance seems directly to offer it self and to promise relief. It is hard in such circumstances to chuse suffering rather than sinning; to be content to bear our burthen still, rather than be eased of it upon such terms. As in a time of persecution for conscience sake; if we should have life or liberty offered us, on condition we will violate the dictates of our consciences; this is an eminent trial of christian patience.

3. A Christian hath need of patience, to persist in waiting to the end to receive the promise. Especially,

If he has lively views of a happy state before him, and comfortable hopes of his own title to it. Here the height of his Christianity increases the trial of his patience. The more relishing the heavenly state is to him, so much the more ardent will be his desires.

If his course be greatly embittered in the mean while, by bodily infirmities, by troubles in the world, by the removal of many of his pious friends and acquaintance to heaven before him; this heightens the exercise of patience to an assured Christian from the delay of his hopes.

If his service and usefulness are to appearance much over. When *Paul* was in a strait between two, which to chuse, being with Christ, or staying a little longer below; he was content upon the prospect of future serviceableness to the Church of Christ, to remain longer in the body, *Phil.* i. 23, 24. But when an aged servant of Christ, who knows whither he is going, but finds that his active work is done, and thinks himself laid by as a vessel of little more use; when such a one is yet continued waiting in pain and weakness, without being capable of relishing the enjoyments, or performing the business of life; this is a singular exercise of patience. And especially,

If he hath long thought himself going, just at harbour, but finds himself driven back again to sea: every such instance is a fresh trial to him.

A Christian then has great need of patience. I proceed,

III. To shew the way, to which Christianity directs us for supplying this need, or for furnishing us with the patience required. And it suggests to us such directions as these.

I. What

1. Whatever is a trial of our patience, we should consider it as *the will of God* concerning us. This is the justest foundation of patience, and the best preparation for it. It will over-awe our souls, to do and bear and wait without fretting or passionate sallies. For what room can there be to repine, when all is adjusted by one, whose *counsel shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure?* And who is a better judge than our selves what is fit for us? Shall not this induce us to say with a placid submission, Lord, *not as I will, but as thou wilt? Let him do what seemeth him good.* If our work in some parts of it is ungrateful to flesh and blood, self-denying and singular; yet should not we think, *who art thou, O man, who repliest against God?* Should we be lawless, or receive law from him? In the whole compass of duty we are doing the will of God, and that is enough. Are we labouring without visible success? Yet we should *at God's command let down the net* again: He may have purposes to serve by our work, though our direct end in it should never be accomplished; or he may accomplish our desire by future endeavours, though those already past have been ineffectual. Are we called to sufferings? We ought to remember, that they come not by chance, but *according to the will of God*, and therefore we may therein *commit the keeping of our souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator*, 1 Pet. iv. 19. We are *waiting till our change come*; but let us think,



that it is *all the days of our appointed time*, Job xiv. 14. Before we *fall asleep*, we must be content to *serve our generation according to the will of God*, Acts xiii 36. to accomplish the measure of service and suffering, which it is his pleasure to assign us, before we are dismissed. And tho' we should in a great measure be past active service, yet if it be his will that we should still remain examples of waiting, is not that a sufficient reason to wait patiently, till he hath *fulfilled all the good pleasure of his goodness in us and by us?*

2. We should strengthen our faith in the discoveries of the Gospel, and live in the daily exercise of it. The principles of faith contain the fittest motives to dispose the mind to a fixed patience and an absolute resignation to the divine will in all circumstances: And under the powerful influence of a lively faith in them, patience will be an easy and a practicable thing. Therefore those who actually *inherit the promises*, are represented as arriving at them *thro' faith and patience*, thro' faith as the principle, and patience as the fruit, *Heb. vi. 12.*

By this means we shall be satisfied, that the exercises of our patience are not inconsistent with the goodness and favour of God. In circumstances that bear hard upon us, we may be ready to conclude, that if these are his will concerning us, they are certain marks that we are not in a state of acceptance.

Whereas

SER. VII. *Christian Patience.* 153

Whereas faith will teach us, that *whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*: That if we endure chastening, God dealeth with us as with sons, Heb. xii. 6, 7.

Faith will assure us of divine care to moderate our exercises in proportion to our strength, to support us under them, and deliver us out of them in due time. Christ assured his first Disciples of a special presence of God with them and care of them, when he foretold the difficulties they were to pass thro', in *Luke xxi.* that *he would give them a mouth and wisdom, which their adversaries should not be able to resist*, ver. 15. And that *not a hair of their head should perish*, ver. 18. And thereupon exhorts them *in patience to possess their souls*, ver. 19. If any should say, that this was an encouragement peculiar to them, the Gospel has left one sufficient to support every true believer, *1 Cor. x. 13.* *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

Faith will refresh us with the prospect of a blessed issue of all: That *blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*, Jam. v. 12.

3. We should carefully cultivate the principle of love to God. That is the character of those, who are declared blessed in the place just mentioned, and intitled to the crown of life after their trials. If then we love God in the darkest hours, we may take the comfort of that promise, and suppress all impatience in view of the approaching reward. And besides this, a strong affection to God will naturally put a good construction upon all his pleasure. We shall not think much of any service to which he calls us, when it is not only *the work of faith*, but *the labour of love*, 1 Thess. i. 3. Then no sufferings for him will be accounted hard, but we shall rather *rejoyce that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his name*. No waiting will be thought unreasonable, while we are satisfied he loves us, and our love to him induces us to interpret all delays as consistent with that.

4. Let us often represent to our minds the present advantages of patience. It is its own reward, as impatience is its own punishment. What more advantageous view can be given of patience, than that of our Saviour, *that by it we shall possess our souls?* We shall keep reason and grace in the throne, and be capable of enjoying our selves in all events: Whereas impatience lays aside the man, and either sets up the brute or the Devil in us, leads us to act a foolish or an outrageous part. Patience lightens our burthen; im-  
patience

patience doubles it, piercing the heart thro' with many sorrows. Patience is the likely way to disarm an enemy; it pleases and honours God, and keeps us in a posture to receive a deliverance from our troubles, or the accomplishment of our hopes, with a double relish.

5. We should often contemplate the great examples of patience. *Be followers of them, who thro' faith and patience inherit the promises*, Heb. vi. 12. *Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us—run with patience the race that is set before us*, chap. xii. 1. The observation of the great patterns of patience will convince us, that it is a practicable thing, and that the best of men have often had the most trying exercises: And it will be of use both to direct and excite to the practice.

Let us especially *look unto Jesus* for this purpose. Think, what trials of patience he met with: The most difficult work to be performed, wherein he often met with *the contradiction of sinners*: The severest sufferings to be undergone: And a time to wait, till his work was finished; for it is often observed in his history, that his time was not yet come. Let us observe also, how he behaved in all these circumstances of trial. With the utmost regard to the will of God. This he came into the world *to do*, tho' that was the most amazing instance of humiliation, *Heb. x. 7.* When his last sufferings were  
at



at hand, while he expressed the desire of human nature, *Father, save me from this hour*, he breathed also the calmest submission to his will; *Father, glorify thy name*, John xii. 27, 28. And in another Evangelist, *Not as I will, but as thou wilt*, Mat. xxvi. 39. His patience was as illustrious to his injurious enemies, praying to his Father on the cross to *forgive them*, Luke xxiii. 34. And *when he was reviled by them, he reviled not again*. And tho' he could have no relish for this world, any farther than to do good in it, yet he was content to stay God's time for finishing his work, tho' he *was straitned with desire, till it was accomplished*, Luke xii. 50. Here was a perfect pattern for us to follow in the way to perfection.

But the examples of others of the excellent *of the earth* in this grace, are not without their use. As the Apostle refers us, *Heb. xii. 1.* to the most eminent saints in general of the old Testament, for an example of patience, as well as of faith; so we are directed in particular to *take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience*, Jam. v. 10. Many of them, under the darker light of the old Testament, as they met with ill treatment, and that for their fidelity to God, so were illustrious patterns of patience. The Apostles were the like under the new Testament; they were *our brethren and companions*

SER. VII. *Christian Patience.* 157

*ons in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, Rev. i. 9.* You may see their case in that of St. Paul, *1 Cor. iv. 9.* They were set forth, as it were appointed to death; made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. And ver. 11. they *hungred, and thirsted, and were naked and buffeted, and had no certain dwelling-place.* Such examples shew us, that God's highest favourites had very ill usage from the world, and great afflictions in it: And their eminent behaviour is a noble pattern for imitation.

And it will be our wisdom particularly to turn our eye to those patterns, which are most directly suited to our circumstances from time to time. *Job* will furnish us with an example of patience in almost all the peculiarities, that can attend afflictions of a common kind: And the noble army of martyrs and confessors, will be of like use, if we are called to suffer persecution.

6. We should be earnest in prayer to God for this grace, *Jam. i. 4, 5.* *Let patience have her perfect work.—If any of you lack wisdom, this wisdom of patience; let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given unto him.* Patience is justly called here *wisdom* by way of eminence, because it is one of the hardest, and yet one of the most excellent lessons of Christianity. Now the Apostle puts the very case in the text, *If any man lack wisdom:* And directs him to ask that  
very

very thing of God. He adds encouragements to such a prayer : *He giveth to all men liberally*, to all who uprightly ask it : And if he gives liberally, we shall have a plentiful stock to spend upon. *And upbraideth not* ; either with coming often to ask it, as the occasions for exercising it are frequent ; or even with past impatience, if men come with penitent hearts to beg a better frame. And as if this was not enough, he adds, *And it shall be forgiven him* ; to animate the assured hope of all sincere supplicants.

For a close,

1. Let those, who are destitute of the principle, be sensible of their need, and solicitous that they may obtain it. We should consider patience as a frame, for which every day's occurrences give us some occasion. And when there is such occasion, patience is a very necessary duty ; as necessary as it is to please God, to honour religion, to keep a good conscience, to run our christian race well. We can no more inherit the promise without *patience* in a prevailing degree, than without an unfeigned *faith*.

2. Let us be solicitous to have this necessary principle daily strengthened, to exercise it upon every proper occasion, and that it may *have its perfect work*. The full work of patience is the highest perfection of a Christian on earth.

Be

SER. VII. *Christian Patience.* 159

Be solicitous to exert its most excellent acts. Not only that we may be preserved by it from sinking and murmuring and notorious misbehaviour: But that there may be the most complacential acquiescence in the will of God; that we may be in a frame for praise in the darkest day. *Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

Study to have the actings of patience easy and ready to you, as there is occasion: To be able to say with *Paul, Acts xxi. 13. I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.*

Be careful, that the exercises of it be lasting: That it be a fixed habit, and not only by starts: Like *Moses*, who made the exercise of patience so constant a practice, that we find but one instance to the contrary thro' his whole story.

And let there be a general exercise of this holy frame upon every occasion, in all the proper instances of it, however it may be tried. In great, as well as in less trials; and in small exercises as well as in great; for sometimes impatience breaks out in men upon trivial occasions, after they have been signal for patience in great and shocking calamities: And in unusual trials, as well as in those to which we have been accustomed. Let our Master find us in such a frame at his coming, whenever it shall be.

SERMON

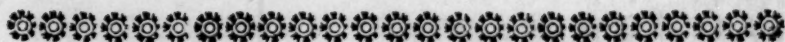




# SERMON VIII.



Loving our neighbour as our  
selves.



MATTH. XXII. 39.

*And the second is like unto it, Thou  
shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.*



HE words are part of an answer given by our Lord to a question, which was proposed to him by one of the *Pharisees* with a captious intention; namely, *Which is the great commandment in the law?* ver. 35, 36. Christ, in return, cites two passages of the old Testament, which contain the sum  
of

of both tables of the moral law, or of our duty to God and man: Plainly intimating thereby the man's enquiry to be a matter of vain curiosity; and that these great branches of our duty rather require our observation, than that we should set them in competition. *The love of God*, and the proper expressions of that, are indeed *the first and great commandment*, ver. 37, 38. It is *first* in order of nature, and in the preeminence of the object to which it relates, and it is the foundation of our duty to our neighbour.

But lest the *Pharisee* should run away with this just commendation of the *first* table, and either represent Christ as making light of the *second*, or excuse himself by Christ's authority in neglecting the *second*, while he paid a seeming regard to the *first*; our blessed Lord not only adds the *second*, but an emphatical recommendation of it also. *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.* Like the first; not only as the observance of that, as well as of the former, may be summed up in *love*; but as it is prescribed by the same authority, and made by the great Lawgiver as indispensably necessary as the other.

I therefore chuse this precept, as our Lord does, to be a summary of the temper due from us to other people; and so to stand at the head of the particular graces and virtues, which have them for their direct object.

In the consideration of it, it will be proper to inquire, 1<sup>st</sup>, Whom we are to understand by *our neighbour*. 2<sup>dly</sup>, What is intended by the *love* of our neighbour. 3<sup>dly</sup>, What is implied in the measure prescribed for this love; to love him *as our selves*. And 4<sup>thly</sup>, As this gracious command stands in the christian institution, I would consider the special obligations of Christianity to such a temper.

I. It is a needful inquiry, whom we are to understand by *our neighbour*.

In the passage, from which our Lord seems to quote the precept, this phrase appears to mean only a man of the *Jewish* religion, Lev. xix. 18. *Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.* The *children of thy people* in the former sentence, and *thy neighbour* in the later, seem terms of the same import and extent, denoting those of the *Jewish* nation and religion. It is indeed commanded in the same chapter, ver. 34. *The stranger that dwelleth with you, shall be as one born among you; and thou shalt love him as thy self.* But the *Jews* understood this only of such, who, tho' they were not born of the seed of *Abraham*, yet became *profelytes of righteousness*; that is, voluntarily submitted to their law, and so became full members of their church and community.

Many

Many proofs might be given of the narrowness of the *Jewish* charity. It plainly appears in the prejudice which remained in *Peter's* mind, even after *Christ's* ascension, against any converse with a devout *Gentile*, as *Cornelius* was, till God by immediate revelation cured him of his bigotry. He spoke the common sense of his nation, when he tells *Cornelius* and his friends, *Acts* x. 28. *Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew, to keep company, or come unto one of another nation: but God hath shewed me, that I should not call any man common or unclean.* And we find, how hardly digested this step of *Peter's* was at first, even by the converted *Jews*; they contended with him, because he went in to men uncircumcised, and did eat with them, chap. xi. 2, 3. They went so far, as to deny the common offices of humanity, or at least not to think themselves obliged to shew them to any but a brother-*Jew*; for which a heathen poet justly lashes them, that they would not shew the way, or discover a spring to quench one's thirst, to any but those of their religion; tho' he misrepresents the matter, when he makes this a precept of the law of *Moses*, for there is no such precept in it.

*Judaicum ediscunt, & servant, & metuunt jus,  
Tradidit arcano quodcunque volumine  
Moses;*



*Non monstrare vias, eadem nisi sacra colenti;*

*Quæsitum ad fontem solos deducere verpos.*

Juvenal. Sat. 14.

The case was this. God had singled them out from other nations to be his peculiar people, and distinguished them by a more immediate government of his own. Now they understood their laws, even the moral itself, to be only the political laws of their community, and only to be observed toward their brethren of that favoured nation.

But Christ hath extended the community, to which our love is due, to all mankind, with whom we have to do.

He plainly puts this extensive sense upon the term, *our neighbour*, in *Luke x*. There, as well as in the text, he sums up our duty in *loving God*, and *loving our neighbour as our selves*, ver. 27. The person, who was in conference with him, asks him thereupon, *And who is my neighbour?* ver. 29. Christ in return puts a case; whether it was real, or supposed, is of no consequence. That a man, falling into the hands of thieves on the road, was left by them in great distress. A *Jewish priest*, and afterward a *Levite* passed by, but neglected to give him any relief. These might be supposed to excuse themselves by saying, that they were not sure this miserable man was a *Jew*, and therefore passed him by. At length another passenger, who was a *Samaritan*,

*samaritan*, came up to the place, and upon the meer sight of a man in distress, without staying to ask who or what he was, very tenderly compassionate and relieved him. Now upon this case, Christ appeals to the lawyer, that had asked him, Who is my neighbour, with another question in return, ver. 36. *Which now of those three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him, that fell among thieves?* Which performed the most neighbourly part to him? The lawyer could not help acknowledging, *He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise,* ver. 37. Tho' it should be a *Samaritan*, that falls in thy way; tho' he should be a stranger, tho' he should be an enemy. The *Jews* and *Samaritans* had the greatest abhorrence one of another. Both shewed it in their treatment of Christ. The *Samaritans* at one time would not receive him into one of their cities, because his face was, as tho' he would go to *Jerusalem*, Luke ix. 53. On the other hand, when some of the *Jews* were in a rage at Christ, they knew not a more opprobrious name to throw out against him, than to call him a *Samaritan*, with an addition as black as hell, *John* viii. 48. *Say we not well, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?*

Now the scene of the case which Christ put being in *Judea*, between *Jerusalem* and *Jerico*, it might well appear most probable to the *Samaritan*, that the distressed person was a *Jew*, and therefore not one whom he

could consider as a brother in religion, but rather as an enemy. Yet being a fellow-creature in misery, he thought that alone sufficient to intitle him to offices of humanity. And herein Christ proposes him to imitation.

We see then the comprehensive latitude, in which Christ would have us to understand *our neighbour*. Not only, according to the usual sense of the word, our neighbours in stated vicinity of abode; or those we call relations; or such, to whom we are peculiarly attached by previous acquaintance, or intimacy and friendship; or those, from whom we have received or may have a prospect of receiving benefits: Nor only good men, or those who are of *the household of faith*. Tho' these and the like distinguishing circumstances of some from others, may oblige us to a peculiar affection, and to more particular and frequent ways of expressing it: Yet all men are to be esteemed our neighbours, within the design of the command, who partake of the human nature, and because they do so.

II. I am to inquire, what is intended by *loving our neighbour*.

It is plain, that this is designed for a summary of the duties of the second table, or of those we owe to the rest of mankind; as loving God is of those we owe to him. So the Apostle explains it, *Rom. xiii. 8, 9. He that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit Adultery, Thou*

*Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.* And again, Gal. v. 14. *All the law, i. e. relating to our neighbour, is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.*

It is such a value for him, upon account of the excellencies of the rational nature which he hath in common with our selves, as disposes us not to deny him any of his just rights or do him any harm, and on the other hand to have a hearty good-will to him, and to be ready to express it in all the proper offices of kindness and beneficence, as we have a just call and opportunity for it.

If it be asked, why all our duty to our neighbour, as well as to God, is summed up in *love*? There are two principal reasons to be assigned for it.

1. Because a due temper of mind to our neighbour, as well as to God himself, is necessary to our acceptance. It is on purpose, that we may attend to the principle, as well as the external act, in this as in all other parts of our duty. Inward love to our neighbour, is the first thing which the spiritual law of God requires from us: And so, ill-will and enmity are the first transgressions of it. Tho' they should proceed no farther than the heart, tho' our neighbour should receive no



actual prejudice from them; yet they would make us transgressors in God's account: If we should *be angry with another without a cause*, Mat. v. 22. If we should entertain a secret grudge, or malice, or envy, or unjust contempt in the heart; tho' it should never break out, tho' external appearances should be ever so fair; yet these things will make us criminal in the sight of God.

2. Because all the particular branches of our duty to our neighbour, will most naturally and easily flow from love to him. If a real inward love to men could be separated from the proper outward effects, then that would by no means be sufficient. The *pretence* of love may be separated from the fruits of it, and that without doubt will fail of acceptance. And therefore we have that caution, 1 *John* iii. 18. *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue [only], but in deed and in truth.*

But therefore all is comprehended in love, because genuine love will lay the most pleasing and powerful constraint upon us, to perform the several particular duties which are required from us. A man that loves his neighbour, will be pushed on by that affection to do the very same things to him, which God requires of him as an act of obedience; so that nothing, as one elegantly says, will remain to turn his temper into obedience, but to direct his intention, and to perform the effects of love in obedience to God, which he

is

is strongly excited to by his own loving disposition.

Justice, and beneficence or charity, comprehend all our duties to our neighbour. And sincere love will effectually prompt to both. If we truly love our fellow-creatures, that will easily obviate any temptation to do them injury, in any concern we have with them, and will not suffer us to be wanting in any known point of duty to them. St *Paul* gives this as a reason for comprehending all under love, that it necessarily includes in it a disposition to righteousness, *Rom. xiii. 10. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* And St. *John* tells us, that it will make us inoffensive, 1 *Joh. ii. 10. He that loveth his brother, abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.* i. e. This will secure him against giving just ground of offence.

And it will equally dispose to the performance of all good offices. It will be a *law of kindness*: Not only make us *harmless and blameless*, but studious to do good, and to treat all as persons we love. Charity or love hath all those excellent properties assigned to it, which we find in 1 *Cor. xiii. 4,—7.* because it has the most extensive influence to produce them all. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not it self, is not puffed up; doth not behave it self unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth*

*eth not in iniquity, but rejoyceth in the truth ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

III. We are to consider, what is implied in the measure prescribed for the love of our neighbour, that we should love him as our selves.

I. This plainly supposes the lawfulness of *some self-love.*

The love of our selves is not indeed in so many words made the matter of a precept, as the love of God and of our neighbour are ; because we have it by instinct of nature, and necessarily, so that we cannot divest our selves of it without putting off humanity at the same time. We need not therefore an exhortation to self-love in general, because it is not indeed a matter of choice, we cannot help it. All that is proper to be the subject of a command, is the regulation of this natural principle ; a direction of us to our truest interest, that we may not pursue a false scent in our general tendency toward happiness. And this is the business of God's commands, in keeping of which there is great reward, our duty being made our interest. All God's promises and threatenings and warnings are an appeal to this natural principle ; they suppose it to be lawful to seek our own welfare, and commendable to take the truest measures for promoting it.

We not only may, but ought to love and seek the welfare of our bodies, as far as that  
consists

consists with our superior interests. *No man, says the Apostle, ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, Eph. v. 29.* No man in his right wits. And for our truest self, our souls, our Saviour represents the folly of neglecting the care of them, *Luke ix. 25. What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself?*

When therefore it is made a term of being Christ's disciple, that a man *must deny himself*, *Luke ix. 23.* it only signifies that he must be content to deny his own sinful inclinations, and irregular passions, and sometimes his present ease and humour and secular interests; but all for the sake of his greater interests, to advantage himself in a higher degree. And when it is described as one of the bad characters of the last times, that *men should be lovers of their own selves*, *2 Tim. iii. 2.* it only means that unreasonable love of our selves, which we call *selfishness*, or such a self-love as excludes the love of God and of our neighbour. But there is a love of our selves, which is not only allowed, but is the necessary foundation of all religion, and is here made the measure of our love to our neighbour.

2. When we are taught to love our neighbour *as our selves*, it may intimate the *reason* upon which we should be well-affected to our neighbour. We should not consider others, (as we are apt to do mankind at large, unless they are more nearly attached to us than by a participation of the same general nature,) as such



such in whom we have no concern, or who are altogether remote from us; but as in a moral sense *our selves*: As we say of a friend or a family-relation, he is to us as our selves; or as it is said of *Jonathan* with respect to *David*, he *loved him as his own soul*, 1 Sam. xviii. 1. In truth every man should in a sense be so esteemed by us all. We stand in nearer relations and under more special obligations to some than to others: But we are so nearly related and allied to all, that it claims our love. This will be more enlarged upon presently.

3. It may be considered as a *direction* to the proper ways of expressing our love to our neighbour. If it should be asked, how we are to express our love to our neighbour, there cannot be a more instructive answer in so few words than this; *Love him as your selves*. How does your love to your self work? You know the motions of your own heart, how the pulse of self-love beats, and what you are ready to do upon that impulse for your own welfare. Now if you had no other instructor or monitor to teach your duty to your neighbour, you might have sufficient direction by attending to the acts and fruits of your love to your selves. We know by feeling what it is to love our selves, and what that carries us to do: The precept before us prescribes this very thing for the rule of our temper and conduct to our neighbour: It leaves us as it were to prescribe to our selves,

†

and

and to take the measure from our selves. As if it had been said, *judge ye of your own selves*, and by your selves, *what is right in this matter.*

Are we not tenacious of our own rights, and very sensible of any injury or injustice done us by others? If we love them as we love our selves, it will lead us to *justice* and righteousness; to be tender of their rights as we are of our own, and to be careful that we do them no harm any more than our selves.

We are quick at discerning any thing valuable in our selves, and apt enough to support our own character. If our love to others be like that which we bear to our selves, it will teach us to observe any thing that is valuable in them, and to pay them the regard and respect due to them, according to what is amiable and commendable in them. And such an impartial view of the excellencies of others, as well as of our own, would be a strong argument to *humility*.

We heartily desire our own welfare in every instance, according to the best apprehensions we can form of it; nor do we content our selves with meer good wishes, but take pains to obtain the several good things, upon which our hearts are set. And if we are in earnest religious, this is our temper and conduct for our selves, with reference to spiritual and eternal blessings, as well as for other comforts desireable in their places. The same disposition extended to our neighbours, would

would form us to universal benevolence, and to be active and industrious in doing good to the souls and bodies of men.

We apply to other people, who we think may be helpful to us in our difficulties, and in promoting our interests. Love to them will make us ready to help them according to our capacity. This would lead to a *merciful* disposition.

We are not prone to be soon angry with our selves, or to put the worst constructions upon our own actions, or to publish our own faults : But we are apt to complain of other people's indecent passions to us, of their censoriousness and of their divulging reports unnecessarily to our disadvantage. We should take the hint from that, to exercise meekness and charity to our neighbours, and to *speakevil of no man* without just reason.

We take pleasure in our own welfare in any instance, and are tenderly affected with our own burthens and sorrows. Love to our neighbour will dispose us to bear a sensible part in his joys and afflictions ; *to rejoyce with them that do rejoyce, and to weep with them that weep.*

And we might carry on the same comparison thro' all the graces and virtues incumbent on us towards other people.

4. This bespeaks the *high degree* of love due from us to our neighbour. We are to love him as our selves.

I cannot

I cannot indeed apprehend, that a strict *equality* is meant. Our charity, or love, is certainly to begin at home. That is indeed imported in its being made the measure of our love to others. And every man is to consider himself as charged in the first place with himself. We are neither to take the same pains for the souls nor for the bodies of others, as for our own.

We are not to extend an equal love to all others alike, but in proportion to what is lovely and amiable in them. Hence good men justly claim a more distinguishing share in our affection than others. *The excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight*, Psal. xvi. 2.

Nor have all at large an equal right to the expressions of our love. Those under our immediate care and charge, in our families or otherwise, require our more special endeavours for the good of their souls. And our own families are first to be provided for in their temporal interest. Men are not to be beneficent to others to the real detriment of their own families. And I believe many are unjustly censured for covetousness, because they do not as much for others as they expect, when really the circumstances of themselves and their families, which are unknown to the world, will not admit of it. Every man must judge for himself, as in the sight of God, what is fit for him to do ; and other people should be very slow in censuring, where they have not sure grounds to go upon.

†

But



But yet certainly, tho' this precept prescribes not an entire equality, yet it bespeaks a high degree of affection due to our neighbour.

That we should love him with equal sincerity as we do our selves: Be as entirely free from all enmity and malice, and ill will to him, as to our selves; and no more allow our selves to injure him.

We should as readily observe and own any thing truly commendable in another, as in our selves; and as willingly make allowances for his imperfections as our own. In the matter of estimation we should endeavour to be impartial; not flattering our selves, or underrating the excellencies of others, *Rom. xii. 10. Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another.*

There ought to be an alacrity and delight in doing any good offices we are capable of to others, as well as when we are serving our selves, which is *loving them fervently*, *1 Pet. i. 22.*

Yea, there are cases wherein we are to prefer their interest to a loss of our own; or their spiritual and eternal welfare to our own present advantage or safety. *St. John* tells us, *1 John iii. 16.* that in some cases *we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* Either be content to hazard them in martyrdom, when our flight and quitting the field of battle may be foreseen likely to expose some

some we are nearly concerned with to fall from their stedfastness. St. *Paul* could say with reference to his beloved *Philippians*, Phil. ii. 17. *If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoyce with you all.* Or we may be called to venture our lives for the defence of the innocent, when they are injuriously assaulted ; or to assist our neighbours in an imminent danger : Or especially to hazard our own lives to secure and save much more valuable lives than our own. So *Priscilla* and *Aquila* had for *Paul's* life laid down their own necks, i. e. exposed themselves to skreen *Paul* in some extreme danger he had been in, for which they had the *thanks of all the churches of the Gentiles*, Rom. xvi. 4.

IV. I proceed to shew the special obligations, which Christianity lays upon us to the love of our neighbour. To this end we may observe, that—

1. Christianity hath eminently provided to carry our love to this large extent, to consider every man as our neighbour. While it has laid a foundation for a more distinguishing affection to our brethren in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, it leads us to consider all men as near to us, and gives us many uniting views of them. For instance,

It represents the natural relation and alliance, which there is between all men as such. The Gospel calls us back to contemplate the

common original of our natures, that *God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth*, Acts xvii. 26. So that we are to consider our selves and others as all descended from one common father; not only from *Adam*, the *father of our flesh*; but as he was *the Son of God*, we are all in common the off-spring of our Father in heaven, ver. 29. When we look upon the meanest or even the worst of men, we should make the reflection which *Job* did in reference to his servants, and for the sake of which he durst not despise them, *Job* xxxi. 13,—15. *Did not he that made me in the womb, make them? and did not one fashion us in the womb?* And this common Father is yet more eminently so, as he is *the Father of spirits*, as he has breathed into them and us living, reasonable and immortal souls; which gives a dignity and rank to men in the order of beings above the visible creation. *There is a spirit in man*, in every man; *and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding*, *Job* xxxii. 8. Now this similitude of nature, especially of reasonable powers, is a just ground of universal love.

The Gospel also acquaints us with the common state of apostacy and misery, in which all mankind is involved. *All the world is become guilty before God*, Rom. iii. 19. This indeed sullies the amiableness of the whole race; but at the same time represents us one to another, as in like circumstances of distress  
and

and danger, and therefore should induce to common compassion and sympathy; and mortify that pride upon other accounts, which might tempt us to set our selves unduly above others.

On the other hand, the good-will of God to men in general is proclaimed in the Gospel, and the kind aspect of redemption not upon the *Jewish* inclosure only, but upon all without distinction. *Christ is the propitiation for our sins*, says St. John; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world, 1 John ii. 2. By that he has broken down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, the *Jewish* covenant of peculiarity, and its appendages. Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; for in Christ Jesus *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female*; there is no difference between them in their capacity of acceptance with God upon the terms of the Gospel; *for they are all one in Christ Jesus*, Gal. iii. 28. Therefore Peter declares, that God had shewed him, that he should not call any man common or unclean, Acts x. 28. Not common, because he was an alien from the common-wealth of *Israel*; nor unclean, merely because he submitted not to the law of Moses. Now this common proposal of a way of salvation to all men, should cement affection and inclination to one another.



Especially when we consider also, that we are taught hereby to look upon all men, as such who may possibly at least share with us in the heavenly happiness. Suppose them ever so bad at present, yet by the grace of God this may be their case. Which certainly should invigorate our endeavours that it may be so, and dispose us to every other friendly office by the way.

Upon such principles as these, Christianity most expressly commands universal love, and the proper expressions of it. That we should *abound in love one toward another, and toward all men*, 1 Thess. iii. 12. *Be patient toward all men*, chap. v. 14. *And shew meekness to all men*, Tit. iii. 2. That we should *do good to all men*, Gal. vi. 10. *And make supplications, and prayers, and intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men*, 1 Tim. ii. 1.

2. The Gospel lays the greatest stress upon this duty. Christ emphatically calls it *his new commandment, by which all men should know his Disciples*, John xiii. 34, 35. It is represented as the very design of the Gospel-dispensation, 1 Tim. i. 5. *The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned*. St. Peter puts a very special mark of distinction upon it, among his practical exhortations, and that in prospect of the end of all things as at hand; *Above all things have fervent charity among your selves*, 1 Pet. iv.

iv. 7, 8. The want of it is declared to be a sure evidence of a state of death, 1 John iii. 14, 15. *We know, that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother, is a murderer; and ye know, that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*

What an honour is put upon this command in the text, when our Lord declares it to be like the first of loving God? He condescends as it were to place it upon a level with the other, at least to make it as indispensibly necessary: And no wonder, when true love to God will certainly produce this, 1 John iv. 20. *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* Our Saviour plainly intimates, that God will not accept our solemn sacrifices to himself, while we are under the power of an uncharitable spirit, by directing us to go and seek reconciliation with our brother, before we offer our gift, *Mat. v. 23, 24.*

3. A general love is recommended to us by the greatest and noblest examples. Not to insist now upon those of the best men;

God himself is our pattern herein. How extensive in his goodness to all his creatures, especially to all his intelligent creatures! How illustrious and sensible the fruits of it! How free and disinterested are all the expressions of his

grace? All he does for mankind, is contrary to their deserts. Yet he *does not willingly afflict the children of men*; but *his mercies are new every morning, and fresh every moment*. He is daily protecting and providing for the wants of our bodies: And most condescending and constant in his compassion for our souls. He *found out a ransom for us*; spared not his own Son, but *freely gave him up for us all unasked*: And is ever ready to *give good things*, even his good Spirit himself, *to them that ask him*. Should not this inspire us with such a god-like temper in our measure? He is directly proposed to us as an example herein. In his common bounty to good and bad, *Mat. v. 44, 45. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you: That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven*; may shew by your resembling him herein, that you are his genuine off-spring; *for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust*. In like manner his grace in giving his Son is set before us in the way of an example, *1 John iv. 10, 11. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*. And St. Paul calls us to *be kind one to another,*

another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us : Herein being followers of God as dear children, Eph. iv. 32. chap. v. 1.

The blessed Jesus, or the Son in our nature, is often in like manner recommended as our example herein. The Gospel-history is one continued account of his benignity and grace to mankind. This brought him down from his throne of glory into our nature and world. His life was one continued course of action for the good of men's souls and bodies. He *went about doing good*, Acts x. 38. Was full of compassion to people in their various afflictions; and thought nothing too mean, nothing too much to do for the benefit of those who applied to him, and often sought out occasions of doing good offices. And his death was intirely designed to be an expression of his unparallel'd love to a sinful world, in conjunction with his love to his Father. And both in life and death he shewed amazing tenderness to his worst enemies. And as this his conduct is in it self most fit to be a moving example to us; so the Gospel often calls us to attend to it as such. The beneficent mind he shewed in condescending to assume our nature, to be so surprizingly humbled in it, and to become obedient unto death, is elegantly described by the Apostle in *Phil. ii.* on purpose to excite us to have *the same mind in us as was in Christ*. And to dispose Chri-



stians to charity to those in distress, the Apostle puts them in mind of *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 2 Cor. viii. 9. And so in *Eph.* v. 2. we are exhorted to *walk in love, as Christ loved us, and hath given himself for us.*

4. The blessed world we have in view should raise our souls to this lovely temper. That is a world of perfect love. While the use of *faith* and *hope* will be superseded there, *charity never faileth*, but arrives at its consummation there; and therefore is *the greatest* of the three, 1 Cor. xiii. 8, 13.

I shall put a period to this discourse with three exhortations upon what has been said.

1. Carefully regulate your love to your selves. To press you to wish well to your selves in general, would be superfluous; for it is impossible you should do otherwise. But to press you to the due regulation of this principle, is one main design of the Gospel. Let not your self-love exert it self under the government of ill placed affections, or tumultuous passions, or unreasonable humour. But let reason and consideration direct you in the choice of your true happiness, and then let your pursuit or refusal of other things be subordinated to that. This is a necessary point of conduct for your own interest and advantage; and it is as necessary to conduct you in your duty to your neighbour also.

2. Be on your guard against *selfishness*, or such an addictedness to your selves, as shall confine your regards within the narrow circle of self. Such a self-love is the main principle of all the evils and disorders in the world; it makes men undutiful to God, and useless, if not pernicious, to those about them.

It would go a great way to the cure of this, if men would entertain a humble sense of their own post in the universe: How small it is in that comparative view, and yet that it is as a link in the chain, which, if out of order or separated from the rest, may occasion many Disorders. We should think of the dependence we have upon others, and our frequent need of them; and how ill an aspect selfishness has in them even in our own account. But especially we should often consider our selves as in common with others, the subjects of the Majesty in the heavens; who assigns every man his post in life, and will call him to an account for his behaviour in it.

3. If we have learned a rectified love and affection to our selves, let us carry the same temper into our behaviour to others. Then we shall *serve our generation*, and at the same time do it *according to the will of God*, without prejudice to our selves in any of our truest interests, and indeed with the greatest pleasure to our selves.

Ever remember the importance and weight of this duty, I should be sorry any Christian should call it *dry morality*; when it is so essential a branch of Christianity, inculcated by our Lord and Master, and all his Apostles, explained or hinted at in most pages of the Gospel, made necessary to our final acceptance, and frequently urged upon us on the foot of the greatest and most distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel.



SERMON



## SERMON IX.

\*\*\*\*\*

Doing to others, as we would  
be done unto.

\*\*\*\*\*

MATTH. VII. 12.

*Therefore all things, whatsoever ye  
would that men should do to you, do  
ye even so to them; for this is the  
law and the prophets.*



OUR blessed Master hath given us  
two short summaries of our duty  
to our neighbour. One is that  
already insisted upon, *Thou shalt  
love thy neighbour as thy self:*  
And the other is contained in the passage now  
† read.



read. Both of them are near akin, and yet in some respects different. An appeal is made in both to every man's own self; and the principle of self-love is supposed to be lawful, natural and necessary, when men are pointed to it as the measure of their temper and conduct to other people. But there is this difference. In the former, we are directly referred to our *self-love* it self, as the measure of our love to others, on the score of the relation wherein on many accounts we are to consider them as standing to us: In this summary, the *expectations* we have from others in reference to ourselves, are offered as the measure of our acting toward them. The former is most properly a rule of *charity*; but this of *righteousness* and *equity*.

In the prosecution of this maxim, I would 1<sup>st</sup>, Offer some things for explaining and stating it. 2<sup>dly</sup>, Shew the strong obligations we are under to it. And 3<sup>dly</sup>, The great usefulness and advantage of attending to it in our conduct.

I. It may be proper to offer some things for the due explaining and stating of this maxim. For however excellent and proper it may be, yet if it is not rightly understood, we may be misled under the countenance of it. The following particulars may be worthy of our consideration.

1. The measure proposed is not, what other people *actually* do to us, but what *we would that they should* do to us. I should not need to mention this, but that in fact it is so common a measure of practice, and what people  
are

SER. IX. *as we would be done unto.* 189

are apt to allow and justify themselves in, if they go no farther than retaliation. "Such a man refused to do me a kind office, when it was in his power; and why should I serve him, when it is in mine? He treated me with rigour and severity, when he had opportunity for it; and why should not I make him a return in the same kind?" But this is the language of a heated, and not of a christian spirit; of passion, and not of reason or grace. For I cannot be justified by that which another does, in doing what I condemn in him: That, which was faulty in him, must be faulty in me too. The law of nature indeed will allow of self-defence, but not of private revenge, any farther than is necessary to a man's own security. Christianity especially teaches us a better measure of acting, than other men's behaviour to us. From this very rule in the text, St. Luke represents Christ as leading his Disciples to do good offices to those who have never yet obliged them, and even to those who have actually disobliged them, *Luk. vi. 31, --- 35. As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners do also the same. And if ye lend to them, of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies. Gratitude for benefits received is an excellent temper, and*

†

what

what is very much wanting in the world ; but it is not the height, to which Christianity calls us, and to which the maxim in the text should carry us: We should shew kindness, as we have opportunity, to those who have not conferred any benefit upon us already, and even to such who have done us ill offices. We have a plain rule against governing our conduct to others by their ill usage of us, *Rom.xii.19,—*  
*21. Dearly beloved, avenge not your selves, but rather give place unto wrath ; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay it, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him : if he thirst, give him drink. For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

2. What we *actually would*, that others should do to us, is not in all cases a rule of our duty to them ; but the lawfulness of the action is to be presupposed. It will not follow, that I *ought* to do or to forbear a thing to my neighbour, or that I *may* do so, merely because I am content or even desirous that he should do or forbear the like to me. That inclination and desire of mine must first be known to agree with the law of God. A notorious drunkard may be willing to be intoxicated and made a beast by another : But it is not therefore one jot the more lawful for him to do the like to another in his turn. A man resolutely set upon an evil course, cares not to be disturbed in it by the reproofs or counsels of his superiors or friends :



SER. IX. *as we would be done unto.* 191

friends: But that does not lessen his obligation to be a monitor to other sinners, especially to those under his care and charge. It is his sin, and owing to his insensibleness of his own true interest, that he would not that others should do so to him; and it is his additional sin, that he neglects on his part what the law of God has made his duty to others. A man's desire, that others should either do an unlawful thing or neglect their duty to himself, will not justify or excuse the like evil actions or omissions in him. To suppose that it would, must be to subject the holy and righteous law of God to men's irregular inclinations and lusts, and so to render it of no effect. Our desires therefore from others, must first be known to be fit and reasonable, and not disagreeable to the will of God, before they are made the measure of our conduct to them.

3. When we and others are in different circumstances, we are not obliged by this measure of action to do exactly *the same things* to them, as we desire or expect from them; but the same things in our circumstances, as we should expect from them, if they were in our condition and we in theirs. God in the course of nature and providence places men in different relations one to another, in various stations and conditions, and has affixed duties peculiar to each of these. Now the intention of this maxim cannot be to confound all relations, and the duties belonging to them; as if, for instance, all that a father

ther



ther may expect from a child, or a master from a servant, or a prince from his subjects, was therefore to be done by such superiors to their inferiors. But the plain meaning is, that a father, a master, a prince should consider what he should reasonably desire and expect from one in the correspondent relation, if he was a child, a servant, or a subject; and then act accordingly. Thus, after the Apostle had laid down the duty of servants, he directs, *Eph. vi. 9. And ye masters, do the same things unto them*; not just the same actions, as they by their relation are obliged to do to you; but see that you perform the duty of your place, as you expect of them the duty of theirs; and with such a manner of behaviour in your peculiar station, as you would account equitable from a master, if you were servants your selves: One instance of which he immediately mentions, *forbearing threatening*, all rough, morose or churlish words or actions, when there is no necessity for them.

4. We are not obliged to do all that to others, which we might probably *be glad they would do to us*, if we were in their case; but all that we could expect from them, as *matter of right and duty*. It is hardly to be doubted, but any poor man would be glad, that a rich person would not only supply his extreme necessity, but give him a good part of his estate, so as to make his circumstances easy and plentiful: And it is very likely, that if we were  
poor,

poor, we might be of this mind. A rich man, who is master of his own estate, may lawfully gratify such a desire; but then he may lawfully forbear it also. Now, that such a generous action of a rich man would be very welcome to any poor man, and to our selves in particular if we were poor, cannot be said to lay an obligation upon any to do so much. Those in prosperous circumstances are bound by this rule to do to another, not all that they might in his circumstances be glad of, but all that they would have good reason to expect upon the foundation of justice, or charity, or friendship, or relation.

The sense of our Lord's maxim amounts to this. "In all your dealings with other men, suppose your selves in the same particular state and circumstances wherein they are; and think, what treatment, what kindness, what allowances you would reckon your selves to have a just claim to expect at their hands, if they were in your case, and you in theirs: And then be the same to them in your thoughts, and words, and actions, as you would have them to be to you: And never allow your selves to do that to others, which you would account injurious or matter of just complaint in your own case.

II. I proceed to shew the strong obligations we are under to be of this temper.

1. It is founded in the reason of things, and is one of the plainest dictates and laws of nature :

ture: Such a precept, as approves it self to the mind of a reasonable creature, as soon as he hears and understands it, so as not to need any laboured proof. Every man is ready to own the equity of it in theory; even such, whose vicious and depraved inclinations carry them off from the practice. Those, who will not make it the rule of their own actions, yet expect others to make it the rule of theirs, and are ready to complain when it is not observed to themselves. It is indeed the basis of all justice and equity between man and man; every instance of which may be reduced to this measure, and proved by it.

The obligation to it results from the sameness of nature, which our great Creator has given to all mankind; as all descending from one original, consisting of like souls and bodies: And therefore whatever rights one has by virtue of this nature, must be common to all, and equal in all. In respect of nature, we are all upon a level, and every man stands equally obliged to another. I am equally obliged to be just and kind, and grateful to another, as he is obliged to be so to me; because God made us all alike in the essential state and perfections of our nature. For accidental differences between men, they cannot cancel or lessen these common rights which are founded in nature: And besides that, it is very possible in the changeableness of human affairs, and frequently seen in experience, that such accidental differences may cease, or the conditions of men

SER. IX. *as we would be done unto.* 195

be perfectly inverted. He who is now a servant, may become a master; and the master be reduced to the state of a servant: The rich may be abased, and the poor exalted. I may come to be in the station, or relation, or condition of another man, with whom I compare my self; and actually need that office from him, which now he expects from me. This makes it ever reasonable, and prudent too, to put my self in his circumstances, since they may be my own; and to behave to him accordingly.

This maxim is so agreeable to natural light, that some heathen writers inculcate the same thing in sense. Especially the *Greek* orator, *Isocrates*, applies it to several cases. He lays it down as the first maxim of virtue necessary to be attended to by youth, next to the veneration of God; <sup>a</sup> *Be such to your parents, as you would have your children to be to you.* And he advises princes to <sup>b</sup> *carry it so toward neighbouring communities that are weaker than their own, as they would have those which are stronger to behave to them.* So he represents a wise and good king directing his subjects to <sup>c</sup> *approve themselves such to others under them, as they expected him to be to themselves:* And <sup>d</sup> *not to do to others, what they cared not to bear from others.* We are

---

<sup>a</sup> *Orat. ad Demonic.* Ed. H. Steph. p. 4.

*Nicoel. Orat.* 2. p. 19.

<sup>d</sup> *Ibid.* p. 39.

<sup>b</sup> *Id. ad*

<sup>c</sup> *Id. ad Nicoel. Orat.* 3. p. 37.



told, that \* “the first founders of the empire of  
 “the *Inca’s* in *Peru*, (which the tradition of that  
 people represents as an empire of vast antiqui-  
 ty) “taught this as one of their first rules, and  
 “indeed upon a very clear and cogent reason;  
 “that men should *neither say nor do any thing*  
 “*to others, that they were not willing others*  
 “*should say or do to them; because it was a-*  
 “*gainst all reason, to make one law for our*  
 “*selves, and another for other people.*”  
 Would to God, that all Christians would go-  
 vern themselves by so clear and undeniable a  
 principle!

2. *This is the law and the prophets.* So  
 our Saviour declares in the text. That is, all  
 the duties to our neighbour prescribed by *Moses*  
 or by the succeeding prophets under the old  
 Testament, are comprehended in this, and  
 may be reduced to it: They are but so many  
 branches and explications of this general rule.  
 For the assistance of men’s weakness and un-  
 thoughtfulness, God saw meet, when he was  
 pleased to vouchsafe a revelation, to be express  
 in injoining the several particulars of social  
 duty; he knew, that in the present depraved  
 state, when our sinful prejudices and selfish bi-  
 asses are so many and so strong, all would be  
 little enough to awaken men to the considera-  
 tion of their duty: But it is much to the ho-  
 nour of this maxim, that it is the *short contents*

---

\* Sir Will. Temple’s *Miscel.* Part 2. Ess. 2. Sect. 3.

SER. IX. *as we would be done unto.* 197

of all the directions, left in the name of God by the law and the prophets, how one man should behave to another.

3. It is still more strongly inforced upon us by Christianity.

Our Lord and Master himself has left us this summary ; and that at the close of his most instructive sermon, wherein he had so clearly and distinctly explained our duty in the most important particulars of it.

The context inforces it by an additional motive ; which is implied in the word that introduces the precept, *Therefore*. In the verses before Christ encourages us to apply to God in our various wants, with an assurance of his gracious answer to our requests : And to animate our hope, argues from the readiness of earthly parents to gratify the desires of their children, to the greater readiness of our common Father in heaven to fulfil the proper desires of us his children on earth : Whereupon he adds, *Therefore all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them* : Making it an inference from God's benignity to us. And the deduction may be made, *in point of ingenuity and gratitude*. Doth the great God, who is infinitely above us, and can never be capable of needing any thing from us, readily give to mankind whatever they can reasonably expect from a kind and loving Father ? And is there not much more reason that we should deal so one with another ? If we are obliged to be followers of

O 3

God

God as dear children, we should readily afford others, after that bright and disinterested pattern, all needful aid, which they may desire of us as a matter of equity, or humanity, or charity. Or, this duty to our neighbour may be proposed *as a necessary term of God's hearing our requests*. Such is the benignity of his nature, that he is very ready to hear us; but he has fixed a constitution, which gives no foundation to hope that he will graciously answer our prayers, if we are unjust or uncharitable to our neighbours. Therefore that we may have the benefit of such an encouraging declaration, let us diligently attend to all the duties of civil righteousness; for God will deal with us, as we deal with others. Declarations to this purpose are very express in Scripture, *Isa. i. 15, — 18. When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, chap. lviii. 9, 10. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am: If thou take away from the midst of thee, the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw*  
out

SER. IX. *as we would be done unto.* 199  
*out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the af-  
flicted soul.*

It may be added, that the Gospel has more clearly put all men upon a level, than seemed to be done by the *Jewish* covenant of peculiarity, as was shewn in a former discourse; and therefore strengthens our obligation to make this a rule of our conduct to all men.

III. I am to shew the vast usefulness and advantage of this measure of behaviour.

I. It is equally fit for the direction of *all*. It is indeed so simple and obvyous a measure of acting, that the plainest and most illiterate people, who are not capable of long and intricate reasonings in order to the discovery of their duty, may receive light from it, as well as those of the most enlarged capacities and attainments. Here is a short and easy way to come at the knowledge of their duty; namely, to turn inward, and catechise themselves in such a familiar manner as this; "Should not I esteem it  
" a hardship to be treated my self, as I am  
" about to treat this person? Why then should  
" I put that upon him, which I should account  
" injurious from him? What should I think  
" my self to have reason to expect from ano-  
" ther, in the same circumstances or relation  
" wherein I now stand, if I had occasion for  
" his good offices? Should not I reckon the  
" same expectations reasonable from me, and  
" act accordingly?" This inward monitor may



immediately and easily bring any man to the point of duty.

2. It will be of singular use *in sudden emergencies*. Many cases occur in life, wherein we have not time for long deliberation, but must speedily and upon the spot determine either to do or to forbear a thing. In such a case the wisest, as well as the weakest, have sometimes need of a short rule, to which they may have recourse for present direction. This is one advantage of having the mind well stored with the express precepts of revelation, that we may immediately call them to mind in an hour of temptation or upon a sudden incident, to point us to our duty and engage us to the practice of it upon the authority of God. Now this one general rule will hardly fail to furnish us with sufficient light for our immediate conduct in any part of social duty. That may emphatically be said of this command, which *Moses* applies more generally; *it is not hid from thee, neither is it far off.— But it is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it, Deut. xxx. 11, 14.*

3. It will contribute to *impartiality* in our judging concerning our duty to others. When we judge amiss in any case to the prejudice of our neighbour's just claims from us, it is owing to an inordinate self-love, which gives us too strong a bias to that side of the question, that is most in our own favour. But if we will change persons, and suppose those concerned  
on

on the other side of the question to be our very selves, then a real hardship to them will appear in its native colours. In one sense we shall put our selves out of the reckoning, that is, as far as self-interest gave an irregular bias; by putting our selves into the reckoning in another sense, that is, by considering what judgment we should pass, if the case was our own. So that this is the surest way to form an impartial judgment.

4. This will minister light *both in what we ought to do, and in what we ought to forbear* toward other men. It is a rule that holds both negatively and positively, though the text indeed only expresses it in the positive form. To do to others what we have reason to insist that they should not do to us, is unjust and injurious; and not to do what we might reasonably desire at their hands, is at least unequal and uncharitable.

5. This will contribute to make our duty *easy and pleasant*; when it is set in so advantageous a light, and recommended by so near and moving an argument. This maxim, if we attend to it, will not only be full of light, but of heat also. It will sweetly draw us to our duty by the most ingenuous motive; and make those very considerations from our selves to push us on to a due behaviour to others, which without such a change of persons are the common impediments to it.

6. It will be of service to discover and enforce our duty to others *in the whole compass*  
of

*of it.* It will be an universal directory. Every obligation to other men, which either can be made out by other reasonings to be a dictate of nature, or which is inculcated by express revelation, may be deduced from this maxim. Our own minds, as far as we are justly apprised of our own interest, will give suffrage to the justice and goodness of it in our own case, and therefore ought to do the like in the case of others. For instance,

*In common and general conversation,* this maxim will be a proper monitor for decency and regularity of behaviour. Reason and Scripture prescribe to us modesty and humility in our converse, without assuming and overbearing airs; courteousness, civility and respect to all according to their stations and characters; a care not to give offence by word or action; meekness and the government of our tempers, in opposition to indecent heats and outrageous passions. And this rule directs and strongly engages to just the same things. A reflection upon what we expect or censure in other people's conversation with us, will direct us to all that in our own conduct, which is the beauty and pleasure of society, and warn us against those things, which are the blemish and the bane of it.

*In negotiation and commerce,* the same rule will prescribe the most exact justice and righteousness in all our dealings. We shall not take advantage of our own power, and another's poverty and helpless condition or his necessary

SER. IX. *as we would be done unto.* 203

cessary dependance upon us, to oppress him or bear hard upon him in any instance; the rich will *not grind the faces of the poor*, when this is made the rule of acting. What should I think of being so used, if I was in their condition? The strictest honesty and truth in trade, would flow from the same principle. The Apostle's precept, that *no man go beyond or defraud his brother in any matter*, 1 Thess. iv. 6. would be the easiest thing in the world to practise; no man would find any temptation to the contrary, if all would but agree to observe this rule; for who is not ready to complain and clamour, when he finds himself over-reached and cheated by another? Would any man allow himself to have *diverse weights and measures*; in the *Hebrew* it is, *a weight and a weight, a measure and a measure*, that is, one to buy by, and another to sell by; if he did but allow himself to consider, that it is not only *an abomination to the Lord*, but even to himself, when men use him in that manner? *Prov. xx. 10.* Would you allow your selves to make a false representation of the goodness or value of that which you expose to sale? or on the other hand to depreciate the value of a commodity beyond what you esteem it to be intrinsically worth, when you are a buyer; if you made it a law to your selves to do to others as you would be done unto? Would you take advantage of other people's unskilfulness, or of their necessity, to put ill things upon them for good, or at an exorbitant price, if this was



was your measure of acting? This principle would carry you honestly and honourably to the execution of every contract and engagement, to the utmost of your power; to the payment of your debts, to the performance of every trust you have undertaken, with exact fidelity; for would not you in justice expect the same your selves? Abundance of practices in the course of business, for which people think they can offer a plausible excuse, would not bear a trial by this standard; and would not sit easy upon their consciences, if they did but accustom themselves to appeal to it, however they may make a shift to justify themselves before men.

*In cases, where others need our compassion and kindness, this will be equally serviceable. How ready will a man be to do good offices to others, according to their necessity and his own ability, who consults his own heart, and what bowels of compassion he would think himself intitled to, if he was the needy person? If he would allow himself to think it very possible, that this may come to be his own case? And especially if he must recollect, that this has already been his case in fact, and what his expectations then were? God touches the Israelites in this feeling strain, *Exod. xxiii. 9. Thou shalt not oppress a stranger: For ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.* To know the heart of another in distress or want, or destitute of friends, either by considering the circum-*

circumstances of such a condition, though we have not shared in it our selves, or especially from our own former feeling; would produce a tenderness and enlarged heart to others in misery. And it would induce us to an obliging and compassionate manner, as well as to give them our assistance it self; to do it cheerfully, without tedious intreaty, without a haughtiness of behaviour, with all the marks of good-will and complacency; for if we were in distress, we should think the value of a benefit greatly lessened by a disagreeable manner of conferring it.

*In censures and reflections upon others*, this rule will be of singular use. If we examine our own hearts, do we not think that we have reason on our side, when we blame others for meddling with our character to our disadvantage, while they have no concern with us? or for putting the worst construction upon doubtful actions? or for spreading accusations of us, before they are well assured of the truth of them? or for proclaiming even our real faults, when they are not able to plead any justifiable reason for it from charity to others, or from the demands of justice? or for their not making reasonable allowances for lesser faults? If they should, for instance, represent that as *a beam in our eye*, which they let pass as *a mote in their own*? In such cases as these, should not we think our selves aggrieved? Let us turn the tables, and

and beware of giving reason to others for any such complaints concerning us.

*In case of provocations*, this precept would be a good clue to our thoughts and actions. We should complain of the hastiness of our neighbour, if he was quick in resenting a word or action of ours, which we are conscious was not ill intended: Of his severity and uncharitableness, if he should presently take advantage of a rash or unguarded expression or action, to expose us to disgrace, or expence, or punishment: And of his inexorableness and cruelty, if, when he had us at mercy, he should not be ready to forgive upon proper acknowledgment and reasonable satisfaction. If men were of this mind on all sides in the world, there would be few quarrels, or they would be short liv'd, and not run into the pernicious and extravagant consequences, which too often ensue upon them.

*In the several relations of life*, this would secure the peace and order both of families and communities, and of all ranks of people. Was but this precept ever present to the mind, the greatest would be restrained from insolence, oppression and tyranny; and on the other hand it would be as effectual to silence many murmurings and complaints of those in inferior stations, because superiors do not every thing to their mind, tho' they cannot charge them with injustice; or because of some lesser faults, tho' for the main they fill up their  
stations

stations well. If we were in their stations, should we be content to be arraigned at every one's humour, and censured without a crime alledged? Should not we expect allowances for multiplicity of cares and various expectations from us? Let this teach us a decent behaviour to our governours. A son growing up to maturity will not think it hard to continue his dutiful respect and submission to his parents, if he thinks what he should reasonably expect from children of his own: Nor would parents willingly provoke their children to wrath by causeless or immoderate severities, if they recollected that they once knew the heart of a child.

And, to mention no more, this rule would be of admirable use *in religious differences*. Had it been attended to, it would effectually have prevented the entrance of persecution into the world. No man then would bear hard upon another, when he has it in his power, because of his different sentiments or practices in matters of religion, as long as he is peaceable and inoffensive; for who would be willing to be so served himself? Every man, who has a conscience, must be sensible how uncomfortable a thing it is to offend it; and will reckon it in his own case an injury in the most tender point, if he is hindred from acting correspondent to it. Suppose but others to have as much conscience as you, and to be as tender of offending it; and you would never find in your heart to tempt them  
by



by severities to do so. The same principle would make Christians in their debates about religion very cautious of passing severe censures one upon another, of managing their contests with wrath and bitterness, or of marking others with the opprobrious names of *Schismatics* or *Hereticks*: For who does not complain of such usage in his own case?

I conclude with some *reflections*.

1. How happy would it be for the world, if the christian institution was generally and heartily entertained? If even this maxim was fairly inscribed on every heart, and all sorts of people were resolved to conduct themselves by it? It would produce a sort of heaven upon earth, and revive a golden age. Bloody wars and vexatious litigations would soon cease; private injuries and domestick contests would be laid asleep; society would be pleasant, and commerce safe; religion would flourish, prejudices abate, and truth prevail by its own evidence. It is a remarkable passage, which *Lampridius* tells us concerning one of the best of the *Roman* Emperors, *Alexander Severus*, in his account of his life; That “if  
 “ any of his army in a march stepped out of  
 “ the road to plunder any man’s possession;  
 “ according to the rank of the offender, either  
 “ he was punished in the Emperor’s presence;  
 “ or if his quality set him above corporal  
 “ punishment, the Emperor would  
 “ sharply expostulate with him, and say,  
 “ *Would*

“ *Would you be willing to have this done unto your estate, which you have done to another?*” And says the historian, “ It was a common saying with him, which he had heard from some *Jews* or Christians, which he carefully retained, and which he ordered to be proclaimed by the common cryer, when he corrected any man; *Do not that to another, which you would not have to be done to you.* He had such a love for this maxim, that he ordered it to be inscribed upon his palace and upon the publick works.” And shall not we, who call our selves Christians, pay an equal respect to it?

2. Of what importance to the whole of religion and goodness is self-acquaintance and reflection? Our obligations to God himself presuppose a knowledge of the natures he has given us, as the foundation in which they are laid. And so we see do all our duties to our fellow-creatures. If we were more conversant at home, that would be our best preparation for all the duties we owe to other beings without us; either to our Creator or our fellow-creatures.

3. This gives the strongest reason to acknowledge, that God’s commandments are not grievous. They are founded in the reason of things, and our very nature and most familiar sentiments point to them. None of them are any farther unacceptable and ungrateful, than as we are gone off from the dictates of our na-

P

tures:

tures: And as far as we *come to our selves* again, we shall relish God's commands.

4. How inexcusable then must it be in reasonable creatures, especially who profess Christianity, if they govern not themselves by this rule? It must be acknowledged with grief and shame, that the practice of the generality of nominal Christians is the reverse of this. Who would think when he looks abroad into the world, and judges of things merely by the extravagances which may be seen every day, that the maxim in the text is a plain dictate of reason, to the justice of which every man is forced to assent? that our Lord and master has prescribed it in the plainest terms? that it is a rule applicable to the various cases of life? How comes it, that a precept so clear, so familiar, so comprehensive, yet has so little influence? Certainly it is to be ascribed to one of these two things; either that men have this principle in their heads, but not in their hearts; they are not altogether unacquainted with the notion, but their appetites and passions have the over-bearing sway: Or they forget this maxim, so as not to have actual recourse to it in the various cases of life. Whatever be the reason, we must certainly be speechless in the great day, if such a truth as this be either a doubtful or an useless speculation with us.

Let us therefore earnestly pray to God, that he will *write this law in our hearts*, and that he will *keep it for ever in the imaginations of the thoughts of our heart*. And let us not  
suffer

SER. IX. *as we would be done unto.* 211

suffer it to lie dormant, but endeavour to have it ever present and ready for use; that it may actually be a lamp to our feet, and a light to our paths. How pleasant will our reflections be, when conscience can bear us this testimony? When other men violate this rule in their behaviour to us, it will be a refreshing support to be conscious that we have not deserved it by an unrighteous conduct to them, nor returned their injurious usage. We may look up with the greater freedom and confidence to God the common patron of the injured; and in this, and all other applications to him, have the firmer hope of a gracious answer, when this is the temper of our minds. Yea, it will be a happy presage of our arrival at last in the blessed world, where all the holy inhabitants are fully of this temper, and act eternally with uninterrupted harmony and concert one towards another.







# SERMON X.

## Christian Meekness.

COLOSS. III. 12. middle of the  
verse.

*Put on——Meekness.*



**T**HIS part of the christian temper might have been considered as a branch of our duty to *our selves*; the regulation of our passions, as well as of our appetites, being a necessary part of self-government, which we owe to our selves. But I have chosen rather to treat of it among the instances of a right temper to our neighbours, because the main expressions of it immediately relate to them.

And

And in the consideration of this grace, I shall proceed in the same method as I have done upon several others: To explain the nature of it, and then to shew our obligations, as Christians, to put it on.

I. I would explain the nature of christian meekness.

The Scripture leads us indeed to consider it partly in relation to God; but principally and most frequently in relation to men.

1. It may be considered partly in relation to God. There is a meekness which becomes us toward him, and there are *two* remarkable instances of it.

1<sup>st</sup>, A full and ready submission of soul to the authority of his word: So as not to suffer any prepossessions of sentiment, or former inclinations, to rise up against the significations of his will, as soon as that is made known to us. This I understand by the character of *the meek* in *Psal. xxv. 9. The meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way*: And in that prophecy of Christ, *Isa. lxi. 1. The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek*: And by the temper, with which St. James directs us to receive the word of God, *Jam. i. 21. Receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls*. In all which places, meekness signifies not only a sedate composure of mind, free from ruffle and hurry; but also a teachable, tractable tem-

per, arising from a diffidence of our selves, and a sense of our need of divine light and conduct: That we have the proper disposition of learners, willing to hear and receive God's instructions; and that therefore we are willing to give up any prejudices, which swayed us before, upon a discovery of his mind to the contrary.

This sort of meekness is a necessary qualification for the obedience of faith, and for the success and efficacy of God's word upon us. We should be of *Samuel's* temper, 1 *Sam.* iii. 9. *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.* Where there is plain revelation, we must meekly submit, and yield up any different apprehension to the declarations of him who is truth it self; and in precepts of duty, cheerfully and readily acquiesce in the significations of his pleasure without any more ado. He is not meek towards God, who is not content to believe what he plainly reveals, unless he is shewn how it is; that is in other words, unless God will please to make him as wise as himself: Or, who is not willing to sacrifice all his present inclinations, and change any present practice, upon God's sole authority; like those in *Acts* x. 33. *Now we are all here present before God, to hear what is commanded of God.*

2<sup>dly</sup>, A cheerful and absolute resignation to his providence, is another branch of meekness towards God: in opposition to fretfulness and murmuring. Tho God allows the com-

complaints of nature under our burthens and exercises; yet he expects we should check and suppress all complaints of *him*, every impeachment of his justice, wisdom and goodness in his dispensations. It is a meek spirit, to *be dumb and not open our mouths* against any thing which God does, *Psal. xxxix. 9.* When we have humbly prayed for any temporal good, if he sees meet to deny it; as soon as his pleasure is known by the event, we should behave like *David* upon the death of his son, *2 Sam. xii. 22, 23.* *He said, while the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell, whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again?* It is meekness, not to charge God foolishly, but to charge our selves with our own sins, when he chastens us for them; and therefore to *accept the punishment of our iniquities*, *Lev. xxyi. 41.*

These are expressions of meekness towards God: And every man, who observes his own heart, will be sensible that he hath no small occasion at some times to rule his own spirit, in order to keep it under the rule of God. But

2. The Scripture leads us principally and most frequently to consider meekness in relation to other men. And so it is plainly to be understood here; for it stands in connection with several graces and duties, which re-



fer to men. The meek are such as exercise themselves in a careful restraint and regulation of their passions, reducing them within the bounds of reason and religion; and so are in their general character, of a sweet and easy, a courteous and obliging behaviour. It consists, and expresses it self, in the following things.

1<sup>st</sup>, In a calmness of temper, and behaviour thereupon, *under provocations*. This is its most direct and eminent province.

The meek will not take offence *hastily*, and without just reason: but be very careful, that they *be not angry without a cause*, Mat. v. 22. We should not rashly suppose, that a provocation is meant. A thing may\* at first carry that aspect, and yet there may be no design either of affront or prejudice; and then certainly what was not ill intended, should not be ill taken. We should not give way to suspicions and surmises, which cannot be supported with good evidence; nor put the worst construction upon words or actions, but the best that they will admit. Resentment should not be allowed to rise, at least should be check'd, till we have carefully considered whether there be ground for it. How much of mad passion would be prevented, if this rule was observed? This is included in the exhortation to *be slow to wrath*, Jam. i. 19. And in those properties of charity, that it is *not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, hopeth all things*, 1 Cor. xiii. 5, 7.

Meekness will not allow resentment to rise higher, than the merit of the offence given. A trivial injury, a reproachful word, a small indiscretion, a casual loss not worth speaking of, raises in many the most outrageous passions: Whereas a meek frame of spirit would esteem such things either not worthy of any notice, or to deserve but a very slight one.

But supposing a real and great provocation, a meek man will keep a strict guard upon his own spirit and words; that his mind be not inflamed by ill usage, nor other people's sins draw him in to *speaking unadvisedly with his lips*; for which in a particular instance *Moses* is blamed, *Psal. cvi. 33*. He was refused an entrance into *Canaan* upon that very account, tho' in his general character he is pronounced to have been the meekest man upon earth, *Numb. xii. 3*. Meekness will make us careful, not to *render railing for railing*; but rather, if possible, to break the force of other peoples unreasonable anger by gentle returns. *Soft answers turn away wrath*, *Prov. xv. 1*. We should gladly try to win with kindness a man that hath injured us, to *overcome evil with good*, *Rom. xii. 21*. How much more pleasant would it be thus to gain our brother, than by unhallowed transports of passion, to break in upon our own peace, and make our selves transgressors?

Meekness will make us slow in using rough methods to right our selves even from considerable

siderable injuries, which we ought not to sit down easy under: It will dispose to try the mildest ways first, to bring people, if possible, by them to reason; to try argument before punishment, and conference before law, and private admonition before we make a publick example. And if at last our own security, or the common good shall oblige to seek publick justice against any, which certainly sometimes may be the case; this should be done without hatred to their persons, and meerly with a view to reach those lawful and commendable Ends. Or if we are necessitated, in a case of property, to appeal to the decision of the law; care is to be taken that this difference upon a point of interest between us and our neighbour be managed with all the temper that may be, instead of being widened by bitter reflections and passionate exclamations. So meekness will direct.

It will always keep us in a readiness to be reconciled, when an offence is acknowledged, and reasonable satisfaction offered. The Gospel teaches us to be rarely and hardly provoked; but to be quickly and easily pacified. *Anger resteth in the bosom of fools*, Eccl. vii. 9. And therefore, with that difficult precept of *being angry and not sinning*, it is connected, that we should be particularly watchful against the continuance of passion: *Let not the sun go down upon your wrath*, Eph. iv. 26. Implacableness is eminently the reverse of the christian temper. When Peter asked Christ,  
How

*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?* Christ makes him this return, *I say not unto thee, until seven times; not only so far; but until seventy times seven. i. e.* Be it ever so often that he hath offended thee; yet if thou canst have hope that he is come to a better mind, thou shouldest be ready to pass it by. Or if he should persist in his ill mind, meekness should guard us against all malice and ill will, and make us ready to help even the worst enemy in the common offices of life, if he need it; and heartily to pray for him, especially for his repentance.

2<sup>dly</sup>, Meekness should express it self in a care to avoid giving offence to others, and a modesty of behaviour for that purpose toward all. St. Paul directs *Titus* to recommend meekness in this sense to Christians, *Tit. iii. 2. Put them in mind—to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.* As this grace will conduct us to a proper behaviour under ill treatment from others; so it will teach us to moderate our affections and passions in such a manner, as not willingly to give offence to others, and to behave in a courteous and affable manner toward all men. As *charity*, so meekness is kind, and doth not behave it self unseemly, 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5. It will make a man observant of the tempers of others, and willingly to deny his own humour in little things, rather than give them uneasiness; and cautious



cautious that neither his words nor actions may carry any thing in them unnecessarily provoking. A meek man will not be over-bearing in company, and full of himself to the neglect of others; but will studiously express civility to all, agreeable to their stations. Most men know how to do all this, when they apprehend it necessary to serve a present secular end: But the grace of meekness would teach us to make it the habitual exercise of our lives, out of a sense of duty to God and from love to our neighbour.

3<sup>dly</sup>, Meekness is shewn in a modest comporting of our selves to our station and circumstances.

It will dispose those, who are in any station of inferiority, contentedly to submit to the duties of that station. It will incline children to *obey their parents in all things, because this is well-pleasing to the Lord*, Col. iii. 20. And servants to *be obedient to them that are their masters, in singleness of their heart, as unto Christ; with good-will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not to men*, Eph. vi. 5, 7. Or, as it is expressed in another place, *Tit. ii. 9. to please them well in all things, not answering again*. It will have a like influence upon subjects, to induce them to *be subject to the higher powers, not only for wrath, but also for conscience-sake*, Rom. xiii. 5. And we find the *ornament of a meek and quiet spirit* particularly recommended to wives, 1 Pet. iii. 4. The meek will cheerfully pay honour to whom honour

*nour is due, and fear to whom fear*; it will be no uneasy thing to them; but the froward fret at any yoke.

On the other hand, the same excellent temper will form persons in superior relations, or under smiling providences, to a lowly and condescending behaviour. Parents should exercise this frame in their management of their children, not behaving toward them in transports of passion. *Ye fathers*, says the Apostle, *provoke not your children to wrath*, Eph. vi. 4. *Husbands* are commanded to *love their wives, and not to be bitter against them*, Col. iii. 19. And *masters* are directed to treat their servants with lenity, *forbearing threatening; knowing that their master also is in heaven*, Eph. vi. 9. These are all precepts of meekness to those in superior relations. And the same should appear in superiority of rank or circumstances. The meek man is not assuming in grandeur, or riches, or power; but his meekness shines more brightly for being set in a more conspicuous light. The meekness of a man in obscurity, is not so easily distinguished from the necessity of his condition: But when it appears in a higher orb, or upon remarkable advancement, it hath more clearly the aspect of virtue. When people treat their inferiors with due regard, are easy of access, ready to do them any offices of humanity as they have opportunity, not apt to take exception at little things, or to use the advantages of their power to revenge every small provocation

cation offered them ; hereby they display their meekness, as well as their humility. When upon advantages gained, upon securities from their enemies power which they had not before, they do not insult, or behave unseemly, but with temper and moderation, and shew a greater disposition than ever to charity and reconciliation ; this shews a power over their own spirits, or eminent meekness.

4<sup>thly</sup>, Meekness is particularly to be expressed by a temperate and calm behaviour in matters of religion. To break out into anger and passion here, appears as if we thought that *the wrath of man worketh the righteousness of God* ; which St. James assures us that it cannot do, *Jam. i. 20*. Men, who pretend to knowledge in religion beyond their neighbours, will confute their own pretensions, if they have not learned this lesson of it, *Jam. iii. 13*. *Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you ?* Many of the Jews, to whom he wrote, made great pretences to this in matters of religion : The Apostle therefore says to them, *Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom*. Let him exemplify the works, to which wisdom directs, with meekness ; or, let him shew by his charity and meekness to his brethren, that his wisdom is superior : And thereupon he goes on to shew, that all bitter zeal is *earthly, sensual and devilish* ; and hath no alliance with the wisdom which comes from above. We have no other method prescribed

or

or allowed by the Gospel, even to those who most obstinately oppose it, but *in meekness to instruct those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth*, 2 Tim. ii. 25. And instead of any effects of rage and passion to bring men to our sentiments, we are taught to be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, the grounds of our persuasion, *with meekness and fear*, 1 Pet. iii. 15. The same spirit and temper is to be carried into christian societies themselves; and offenders against the law of Christ are to be treated, and their recovery endeavoured, *in the spirit of meekness*, Gal. vi. 1. So that, though possibly there hath not been a greater violation of this holy temper through every age, in any one instance than in matters of religion; yet indeed there is no case, wherein the exercise of it is more indispensibly required.

II. I am to shew our obligations, as Christians, to the exercise of this grace. And certainly much more of real Christianity lies in it, than most people are willing to think. The following considerations may shew the importance of meekness.

1. It is a frequent precept of the Gospel. This plainly appears from many passages already mentioned in giving an account of its nature, and might be made more evident from others. It is pressed upon us, as an eminent branch of  
I
that



that walk which becomes our christian calling, *Eph. iv. 1, 2. I, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.* If you would know, how that is to be done, the practice of humility and meekness lead the van in the Apostle's direction: *With all lowliness and meekness.* If this command be habitually neglected, it will prove us insincere, and as truly as any other instance of stated disobedience.

2. It is represented as essential to a true Christian, as much as any other particular grace or virtue. *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:* And if we have the Spirit, we have his fruits in us: Now this is one of his necessary fruits. And it is remarkable, that when the Apostle reckons up several of them, he not only mentions *meekness* it self by name as one; but indeed the greatest part of his instances are either branches of meekness, or very nearly allied to it; such as *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness*, or beneficence, *Gal. v. 22, 23.* And among *the works of the flesh*, to which these are opposed, we find *hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings*, ver. 20, 21. Again, *if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:* But the Apostle represents meekness as a necessary branch of *the new man*, and recommends it as such in the text. So that really a man may as truly be a genuine Christian without faith in Christ, as without prevailing meekness.

The

The necessity of it will farther appear from that solemn declaration of our Saviour himself in *Matth. v. 22.* *I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.* Our Saviour is here vindicating the spiritual nature of the *sixth* command, which forbids murder, from the corrupt glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees. They taught men to think, that the gross acts of sin only made men liable to punishment; and so particularly, that *whosoever should kill, should be in danger of the judgment*, ver. 21. Or that actual murderers only would be punished as breakers of this command. But Christ lets his hearers know, that though such only might fall under punishment from men, yet there are evils which fall far short of downright murder, by which men will be liable to punishment from God, and that in proportion to the degree of their offence. I apprehend that in every instance he mentions, he intends the punishments of another life: But to express the proportion of punishment, answerable to the heinousness of the offence, he seems to allude to the several degrees of punishment, to which the *Jews* thought offenders liable; common offenders to punishment by the ordinary judges which they had in all their cities, called here *the judgment*; bolder criminals to greater severities

ties inflicted by their higher council or Sanhedrim, called here *the council*; and the most hardened and profligate of all to the miseries of another life, called here *hell-fire*. Now all the offences he mentions, and against which he denounces severe threatnings, are only so many steps of unbridled passion. *Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause*, whoever indulges rash and causeless anger, will without repentance fall under the anger of God. And *whosoever shall say to him, Raca*, which signifies a vain, empty, worthless fellow; he who suffers his passion to carry him on to mock and deride others, shall still be more severely punished. *But whosoever shall say, Thou fool*, which word signifies in Scripture not only a defect of understanding, as we commonly mean by it, but a prophane, wicked or vile man; so that the meaning is, he who shall allow his passion to transport him so far, as to revile and slander others, to represent them as not only fit to be despised, but even to be abhorred; he shall meet with still sorer punishment. You see then, that Christianity is so far from allowing the indulgence of passion, that Christ here expressly declares that it excludes from the kingdom of heaven, and exposes to the wrath of God.

3. Meekness hath particular characters of honour put upon it in the Gospel. It is a principal *ornament*, 1 Pet. iii. 4. which makes a person's face to shine, and his profession to be amiable. And in the same place it is declared

to be *in the sight of God of great price*, a temper with which he is highly pleased. And no wonder, since *he that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city*, Prov. x. 32.

He is the most glorious conqueror, who has obtained a victory over himself. A peculiar blessedness is pronounced upon such. Christ is pleased to single out this virtue for one of his beatitudes, at the beginning of his preaching the Gospel, *Matth. v. 5. Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.* As he proceeded afterwards to declare the necessity of it to our inheriting heaven, *ver. 22.* as hath been already observed; so he was pleased to begin with a recommendation of it from its subservience to our present comfort, by repeating an ancient promise made to it, *Psal. xxxvii. 11. that the meek shall inherit the earth.* It has a natural tendency, in the ordinary state of the world, to promote men's temporal interest and ease and reputation. While unbridled passions tend to make all about us our enemies; they must be of a very brutal nature indeed, who will be outrageous against a man, that studies to walk harmless and blameless, and to give offence to none. The meek at least will be free from those vexations and troubles of life, which hasty, froward people bring upon themselves, as the fruits of their own provocations. They have the security of God's providence and promises for so much of the good things of earth, as shall be for their real wel-



fare; and if they meet with unjust and ungrateful returns, they may confidently rely upon God as their protector and avenger, who is ready to *rise to judgment to save the meek of the earth*, Psal. lxxvi. 9. And whether they have a larger or a less share of outward good, yet they are prepared by the mastery of their passions to enjoy more comfort in what they possess, than those who interrupt their enjoyment by the tumults of their own minds.

4. We have Christ's example here to recommend and inforce the exercise of meekness. This was a bright part of his character. He calls us himself to *learn of him, because he was meek and lowly*, Matth. xi. 29. Not only to receive the rather his instructions in general upon this account, as these are recommending qualifications of a teacher; but particularly to learn these excellencies from him as our pattern in them. Hence St. Paul beseeches Christians *by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*, as known and conspicuous branches of his character, 2 Cor. x. 1. And so they certainly were.

He had indeed the natural affection of anger in him, and could express it upon proper occasions. *He looked round about* on his captious enemies *with anger*, Mark iii. 5. He had the affection it self, as a proper affection of human nature; without that he could not have been a proper pattern to us of the due regulation of it: And the regulation, not the extirpation of it, is required of us; that we *be angry, and*  
*sin*

*sin not.* In this he was a perfect pattern to us.

He was never angry without a cause. We do not find him *often* angry, but only upon some extraordinary occasions: Nor was he ever transported into indecent passion. The hardest words he spoke, were owing to his knowledge of hearts, and to his prophetic character; not to the transports of passion.

He usually chose to turn away wrath or prevent it by soft and gentle answers; by mild expostulations and calm reasonings, rather than by severe expressions. We find instances of this upon the most injurious charges. When he was charged by some of the *Scribes* with no less than *blaspheming*, upon his pronouncing pardon to a man sick of the palsy, *Matth.* ix. 2, 3. he coolly justifies himself by appealing to his miraculous power of healing as a proof of his authority to pronounce absolution to the man. And when in the same chapter, *ver.* 11. he was reproached by the *Pharisees* for undue familiarity with publicans and sinners; he chose the way of mild reasoning with them, acquainting them with the peculiar need such people had of his good offices, and the design of his coming to save miserable sinners, *ver.* 12, 13. When the same sort of people censured his Disciples, *Matth.* xii. for plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath-day, when they were hungry; he only gives them irrefragable proofs of the lawfulness of such a practice in their circumstances, from allowed ex-

amples, from the design of the sabbath, and from his own authority as the Lord of it. And when his enemies, upon one of his eminent miracles, went so far as to ascribe them to a confederacy with the devil; instead of *rendring railing for railing*, he only confutes their vile cavil with the greatest strength and force of reasoning, and annexes to it a necessary warning against their persisting in their obstinacy, *Matth. xii. 24, &c.* When some of his hearers were so enraged as to attempt to stone him; yet he reasons with them with the utmost calmness and composure; *Many good works have I shewed from my Father; for which of these works do ye stone me?* John x. 31, 32. Could any thing be at once more gentle and convictive? He treated even Judas himself, notwithstanding all the aggravating circumstances of his crime, with unusual softness of speech: As one Evangelist represents it, *Friend, wherefore art thou come?* Matth. xxvi. 50. Or, according to another, *Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?* Luke xxii. 48. Which is no more than an appeal to his own conscience. These instances shew us, that meekness and returns gentle in the manner of them, but strong in the matter and to the purpose, are ordinarily the best ways of dealing with ill-minded adversaries.

At other times we find Christ perfectly silent, when he could have no hope of doing good by speaking. So he behaved, when the two false witnesses appeared against him, *Mat. xxvi.*

62, 63. His adversaries were resolved and fixed in their determinations against him; and he could have no prospect of bringing them to a better mind by debating the matter with them, and then he chose to say nothing. *Thou oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his Mouth; he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth, Isai. liii. 7.*

And upon the greatest provocations, he was most remote from a revengeful temper. As he would not countenance his Disciples, but reprov'd them for pretending to call for fire from heaven against the *Samaritans*, upon their ill usage of him and his followers: So he maintained a good-will to his outrageous enemies; *Father*, says he on the cross, *forgive them, for they know not what they do*, Luke xxiii. 34. *Forgive them*; that is what I wish for them: *They know not what they do*; that is the best apology I can make for them. Herein he teaches us meekness and gentleness under the worst usage.

By way of reflection then,

1. Be persuaded to *seek meekness*, Zeph. ii.
3. Propose it to your selves as a matter of necessity, that meekness should ordinarily have dominion over passion. And carry the conquest as far as you can.

To this end, it will be of great moment, that a careful guard be kept upon our hearts,



and that the beginnings of anger there be observed. It will be much easier to extinguish it in the first sparks, than when it has flamed out. Fixing it as a law to our selves, that we will make a short pause, upon the first rise of a resentment, would stifle most passions in the birth.

All prudent precaution should be taken, in reference to the ordinary sources and occasions of passion. And I may venture to say, that lowering our inordinate esteem of two things, of *our selves*, and of *this world* and its affairs, would go a great way in removing the fuel of passion. For external occasions, as far as we can foresee them likely to provoke, we should carefully avoid coming in the way of them, farther than necessary duty obliges: If we cannot avoid the occasion, we have reason to double our guard, when we are aware of the danger.

To think often of our own frailty and liability to offend, how many indiscretions and weaknesses at least, others have to bear with in us, would be an habitual preservative against hastiness with them. It would cherish in us *the spirit of meekness*, to *consider our selves, lest we also be tempted*, Gal. vi. 1.

The indecencies and ill effects of passion should be often called to remembrance. Every man is sensible, when he sees another in a transport, that he is in a fit of madness: Now we should see our own face in that glass. What mischiefs has passion produced  
in

in the world? I may rather say, what has it *not* produced? How much sin does it occasion in others, as well as in the transported man himself? What shame and sorrow have our own past fallies cost us in our cooler hours? These things should be laid up as guards against new temptations.

But along with all, let us often seek meekness of God by prayer. Let us pray for the Spirit, one of whose fruits it is.

2. See that your meekness be indeed a christian grace. Some by the turn of natural temper find it easier to restrain passion, than others: And certainly they have reason to be thankful to God for that advantage in their constitution; and the extravagancies of passion would be the more criminal in them upon that account. But as far as it is meer good nature, and not performed out of a sense of duty to God, it is not a christian grace. To make it so, it must be animated by christian principles, and exercised by the direction of the christian rule.

Those, who by their natural make have a stronger proneness than others to be warm and eager, or to be peevish and morose; should yet remember, that that will not release them from obligation to the grace and duty of meekness. If it be more difficult for them to govern their passions and behave as becomes the Gospel; yet this is absolutely necessary by the christian institution, and there is no help for it but they must take the more pains

pains with their own hearts, watch more their own spirits, and be the more earnest in prayer to God. They are not incurable by the heavenly physician: And they will have one advantage upon a conquest, above those of milder natural tempers, that it will be more evident that their meekness is really from religion.

3. Let us not lay much stress upon an excuse commonly made for other faults, that they were done in a passion. When such evil consequences might be foreseen, at least as possible, they should rather have fortified us against the admission of passion, than passion be made use of afterwards as a plea for them. A true Christian will rather consider those evil effects of his passion, as aggravations of the sinfulness of it, and therefore be more watchful for the future, and diligent to grow in meekness: Which will be a growing preparation for the heavenly world, where neither pride nor passion have any place, but all is calm and serene, peaceful and happy.



SERMON



# SERMON XI.

## Peaceableness.

### ROM. XII. 18.

*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*



**T**H E several expressions and exercises of a peaceable disposition belong to other graces and virtues, or naturally flow from them : Yet as they are all directed to this special end, the promoting of peace, we may consider them as making in a sort a particular excellence or branch of the christian temper. I have chosen this



this passage of the Apostle to represent and recommend a peaceable spirit, because it is especially expressive and emphatical.

And there will be occasion, 1<sup>st</sup>, To shew the general import of the exhortation. 2<sup>dly</sup>, What is implied in the qualifications added; *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you.* 3<sup>dly</sup>, The extent prescribed for our aim and endeavour in this matter. *With all men.* Under which, the particular duties incumbent upon us for this purpose will naturally come to be considered. And 4<sup>thly</sup>, The importance of a peaceable spirit in Christianity.

I. The general import of the exhortation to *live peaceably*, may be reduced to two particulars.

1. That we should have a hearty love and value for peace, as far as it may be obtained. Considered as a christian grace, it must begin in the temper. Heathen morality taught no more to be necessary than the performance of commendable actions; or when their moralists directed to look deeper, to an inward disposition and principle, it was principally as that might forward and facilitate the outward practice. But in Christianity, the principle and temper have the main stress laid upon them in order to acceptance with God; that *whatever we do, we do it to the Lord, and not to men.* So the *peaceableness* of the *spirit* is of main account with God. To bear a hostile mind to our neighbour, is highly offensive to God, though

though it should not break out into act. And in order to his acceptance, this inward disposition to peace must arise from religious principles. It must not be the meer result of a more quiet and easy natural temper; but flow from a regard to God's authority, injoining it as a necessary duty by the voice of nature and Scripture, and from a sincere love to men thereupon.

2. That we studiously direct our conduct so, as may be most likely to reach this end: Or *follow peace with all men*, Heb. xii. 14. That we gladly embrace all becoming methods for cultivating amity; and as carefully avoid every thing which tends to break the peace. It is a vain thing to pretend we are lovers of peace, if it plainly appears in our conduct, that we are litigious and provoking, pettish and contentious, ever stiff and unyielding in our demands, or in other respects take the ways, which make, or keep open, or inflame differences.

II. I proceed to shew, what is implied in the qualifications added; *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you.*

1. It is evidently intimated, that it is not always possible, or in our power, to reach the desirable end of peace. Those, who conscientiously and in earnest *seek peace and pursue it*, according to the exhortation, *Psal.* xxxvi. 14. yet sometimes find, that it flies from them as fast as they pursue it.

†

Some-

Sometimes this falls out in common life, through the perverse humours and unreasonable obstinacy of those, with whom we have to do. There are people in the world so captious, as to take exception and offence without any foundation, who catch at the most innocent occasions to work up their minds to resentment: And so inveterate, that they will not give up a prejudice once entertained, upon the best reasons offered, or the most condescending steps taken to satisfy them. They are not to be gained by kindness, but it rather makes them more insolent: The more they discern that you seek peace, they will be at the greater distance from it: Every concession imboldens their animosity; and there is no peace to be had, but by ceasing to have any thing to do with them, or by just punishment. The generality, it is to be hoped, are not so abandoned; but whoever converses any time in the world, will hardly fail to meet with some such ill-turned minds. The *Psalmist* had occasion to complain of such in his time, and it was a very uncomfortable circumstance of his life, *Psal. cxx. 5, 6, 7. Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesek, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar. My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.*

Sometiemes it is not *morally* possible, or in our power, to be at peace with men; because they will not be at peace with us, unless we will violate a good conscience. We only can  
do,

do, what we may do lawfully. *Id possumus, quod jure possumus.* Men may be displeased for that, wherein we act most conscientiously toward God: This we cannot help, for we must not sacrifice conscience in any instance to peace, though all the world should be angry with us. Peace, though so desirable a blessing, is not to be purchased at any rate; but only pursued, as far as consists with superior obligations, as far as we are left at liberty to seek it without violating our duty. For instance,

Neither *truth* nor *holiness* are to be sacrificed to peace. That would be to sacrifice our peace with God and with our own consciences, for the sake of peace with men; which for certain would be much too dear a bargain. We are required to *love the truth and peace*, Zech. viii. 19. Truth first, and peace only in consistence with the other. We are to *buy the truth, and not sell it* upon any terms, Prov. xxiii. 23. A regard to peace may justify us in keeping some of our sentiments to our selves, which are of less importance; but never in denying the least truth. And so, we are to *follow peace with all men*, but in conjunction with *holiness*, Heb. xii. 14. For *the wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable*, Jam. iii. 17. Truth and holiness then are undoubtedly preferable to peace; and if we can't procure the favour of others without *making shipwreck of faith or of a good conscience*, we must be content without it. It should be  
esteemed



esteemed by us *impossible*, what *lies not in us*, to profess any thing contrary to what we think the doctrine of Christ, or to practise any thing contrary to what we judge the law of Christ, even in the least instance, to gratify the whole world.

Nor should we decline any service we are capable of, to the interest of Christ or of our country, for fear of some people's offence. Christian courage and fortitude should extinguish such fears. To *contend earnestly* for that which we apprehend to be *the faith once delivered to the saints*, when it is opposed, will never be construed by God or equitable men for the mark of an unpeaceable spirit; as long as we do it only by fair reason and argument, without injurious representations of the sense of those we oppose, or uncharitable reflections upon them; in a word, if we intermix not passion or injustice with our zeal. Nor is it a defect of any thing becoming us in order to peace, if we will not sacrifice the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, by complying with impositions in religion, which have no more than human authority.

We may displease some, and occasion their being our enemies, by making head against their vices and immoralities, and by bringing them to deserved punishment for the mischief they do to the community: They may call those *the troublers of our Israel*, and disturbers of the peace, who will not suffer them

them to proceed with impunity in open profaneness and sensuality, but contribute their utmost to the execution of the laws for *reformation of manners*: But they may as well impute unpeaceableness to them, who endeavour to detect the thief or the cheat, or any other publick nuisance. Attempts against open licentiousness in morals, are as truly conducive to the publick tranquillity and welfare, as any other prosecution of crimes against the society. Here peace with particular persons should be out of the question with a Christian, who acts under superior obligations to God and his country.

Where peace then cannot be maintained in full harmony with truth and duty, it should be esteemed, by a man devoted ~~by~~ God, an to impossibility. But—

2. This addition greatly inforces the precept, when it may consist with higher obligations. We must not venture every thing for peace, nothing which is more valuable than it self; but we should esteem it worth a great deal of pains and self-denial. If we can compass it by any means that are fit for us to use, we should endeavour it, and tho' past endeavours should have failed of success, yet still attempt to reach so valuable an end, as long as any hope of success remains.

3. It is implied farther, that we shall have reason to be content and easy, tho' we should miss of our aim, if we have performed our part. Do but what lieth in you, and no more

R

can

can reasonably be expected: Then the breach of peace may be your affliction, but it will not be your sin. You may entertain comfortable reflections in your own breast, and hope for divine acceptance and reward. You may cast your cares upon God, for protection against the designs and ill offices of the unpeaceable, or for supports under the trial of their ill-will; or hope that possibly in time they may be recovered to a better mind: That *when your ways please the Lord, he will make your enemies to be at peace with you,* Prov. xvi. 7.

III. The extent prescribed for our aim in this matter, is to be considered. Live peaceably *with all men*. There is a *civil* peace and concord to be cultivated with all men at large; and there is a more *peculiar* peace and harmony, which we should endeavour to maintain with our fellow-Christians as such. These are of distinct consideration.

1. We should endeavour to live peaceably *with all men* at large, as far as we have any concern with them. Set aside the consideration of their religion or their virtuous character, we are obliged by the dictates of nature and of Christianity too, to study peace with them as our fellow-creatures. And to this end,

1<sup>st</sup>, We should be careful to behave inoffensively to all. To *give no offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church*

*Church of God*, 1 Cor. x. 32. That, if possible, we may prevent any difference from arising.

No man should be treated with insolence and rudeness, with injurious or reflecting words, with outrageous and indecent passions; which every man knows to be directly provoking. A peaceable man is not ordinarily *a wrathful man*, because such a one *stirreth up strife*, Prov. xv. 18. Nor *a forward man*, for the same reason, for he *soweth strife*, chap. xvi. 28. Nor *a scorner*, for he gives rise to *contention, strife and reproach*, chap. xxii. 10. He will not behave with haughtiness, but with humility and meekness. If we are for peace, we shall be so far from allowing our selves to do our neighbour a real injury, that we shall endeavour to conciliate and secure his affection by any offices of humanity and friendship within our power.

A lover of peace will observe the tempers of others; and when he knows them to be peculiarly tender, and apt to take exception, instead of reckoning it a pleasure to put them out of humour, he will rather restrain himself from such innocent freedoms with them, as he might use to others without the least offence.

We should not intermeddle unnecessarily in the affairs of others, or act the *busy-body*, which is mentioned in Scripture as a very ill character, and is known to be a frequent incendiary. We should not pry into the secret concerns of



other people, that do not concern us, the affairs of families, or the behaviour of relations one to another : Much less should we divulge what we hear to the disadvantage of our neighbour, any farther than the honour of God or the interest of some other persons make it necessary. There are a set of miscreants, who often bring themselves into the briars, and break the peace of neighbourhoods, and families, and friends, by making it their business to pick up ill stories of others, to spread them again in conversation ; either merely that they may furnish themselves with matter of talk ; or for a worse reason, that they may gratify their own vile inclination to detraction and backbiting. Some are thus imployed out of idleness. *We hear, says the Apostle, that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies, 2 Theff. iii. 11. And 1 Tim. v. 13. They learn to be idle, wandring about from house to house ; and not only idle, but tatlers also, and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not.* These are pestilent makebates in civil and religious societies. *A tale-bearer revealeth secrets ; and therefore where he is not, the strife ceaseth, Prov. xxvi. 20.* But those, who *study to be quiet, will mind their own business, 1 Theff. iv. 11.* And if people would agree to do this more, and mind the affairs of others less, it would go a great way to maintain the peace of the world.

Another

Another thing necessary to prevent offence and secure peace, is, that we are careful to give all in their several stations the regard and respect due to them. As justice requires this, so it is the way to peace. That we pay a quiet submission, to lawful authority, and give not in to noisy complaints and murmurings against those in power, upon every step in the administration which seems doubtful to us. And surely a little modesty would teach us to be very tender in judging of things much above us. If we make conscience of *rendering to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour*; as it is our unquestionable duty, *Rom. xiii. 7.* so we cannot but apprehend how much it would contribute to peace.

2<sup>dly</sup>, We are equally concerned, in order to peace, not to be quick in taking offence. Possibly as many quarrels in the world owe their rise to a temper unduly exceptionous in some, as to a provoking humour in others. That is, they proceed from offence taken without ground or real design. They are founded upon misunderstandings, and wrong interpretations of words or actions: And that is esteemed a great and heinous provocation, which a small share of humility and charity would have past over in silence, or soon forgot. A man of a peaceable spirit will put the best construction upon things doubtful; and suspend sharp resentment, till facts are ascertained; He will

not admit prejudices upon uncertain hearsays; but examine the truth of them, before they make impression. If some reckon it a point of honour to be quick at resenting a provocation, I am sure it is the reverse of Christianity; and can neither be for the service of the world at present, nor contribute to a comfortable account at last. That which was observed upon meekness, is equally true of a sincere love to peace, that it will restrain from deep resentment of small injuries, though they should be real; and from such passionate expressions of displeasure thereupon, as serve to no other purpose but to inflame a difference. Many people might soon have received proper satisfaction for an injury done them, if they had not themselves over-rated it, and carried their resentment beyond all regular bounds, till they made a small breach wide and most difficult to be healed.

3<sup>dly</sup>, We should be desirous to regain peace, as soon as possible, whenever a difference actually arises. The *implacable* are reckoned among the greatest sinners, *Rom. i. 31*.

If we have given offence by any hasty or imprudent action, a love to peace will push us on to set matters right; to explain our conduct, if it hath been mistaken; or chearfully to acknowledge our fault, if we have done amiss. So Christ teaches us, *Matth. v. 23, 24. If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberst that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* On

On the other hand, if we have received a small injury, we should be easily satisfied with our neighbour's acknowledgment. Christ, knowing the proneness of men to be too obstinate in their resentments, prefaces a command to the contrary with a solemn caution, *Luke xvii. 3, 4. Take heed to your selves; watch your own spirits, that you may the more easily comply with what I am about to say: And that is; If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.*

Or, though a person, who has offended us, should not according to his duty make the first overture for reconciliation; yet, if there be any hope of succeeding by our taking the first steps, surely we should not stand upon forms to obtain so great a blessing as peace.

Yea, we should be willing to sacrifice little things, and to recede from our strict rights in some cases, rather than perpetuate a quarrel. This I take to be one part of our Saviour's meaning in *Matth. v. 39, 40, 41. Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.* Not that our Saviour requires us patiently to put up every injury done us. In



some cases that would be a prejudice to the community, an encouragement to injurious men, and a wrong to our families. But I apprehend, that two things were especially in our Lord's intention. One is, that in the beginning of Christianity, when there were none but Heathen and Jewish judges, he would have his Disciples, for the credit of Christianity, not to appear litigious by appealing to their courts upon slight occasions. And the other is, that for smaller injuries; either in their reputation, such as smiting on the cheek, which was a mark of contempt; or in their property, as the taking away of a coat; or in their liberty, as compelling them to go a mile out of their way; they should rather pass them over for the sake of peace, if they could have reasonable hopes that such soft treatment would make a good impression on them. Certainly those, who are resolved to give up nothing of their strict rights for the sake of peace, are not hearty lovers of it. *Abraham's* example in respect of *Lot* was truly commendable, when no great damage could insue upon his yielding to him. When their herdsmen differed, *Abraham*, instead of saying, I have as much right as you to this countrey, or I have a superior right, as I am the elder, and your uncle, chuses to say, *Gen. xiii. 8, 9. Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou wilt depart to the right hand,*

*hand, then I will go to the left.* Prudence indeed must direct, how far this may safely be done in particular cases; but a strong love to peace will certainly dispose to submit to some inconveniences to obtain it.

2. We should endeavour to cultivate a *more peculiar peace* and harmony with all our *fellow-Christians* as such. Over and above that, which we are directed to maintain, as far as in us lies, with all men in common, the Gospel prescribes something special in this matter with reference to the visible subjects of Christ's kingdom, and members of his body, *Mark ix. 50. Have peace one with another. Rom. xiv. 19. Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. 1 Cor. xiv. 33. God is the author, not of confusion, but of peace, as in all the Churches of the Saints. Eph. iv. 3. Keeping the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace. 1 Thess. v. 13. Be at peace among your selves. 2 Cor. xiii. 11. Be of one mind, live in peace.*

Such passages as these are plainly designed, not only to enjoin Christians to live peaceably together, in the same sense as they are obliged to do so with all men, in the common offices of life; though for certain that is included, and with peculiar bonds to do so as we are fellow Christians: But also to have a peaceable spirit toward one another especially in matters of religion.

It

It must be owned indeed with grief and shame, that in fact there have never been greater, more outrageous, more lasting and inveterate dissensions in the world, than among those called Christians, and upon the score of their religious differences. Much blood hath been spilled in these quarrels. And where contests have not been carried to that length, yet nothing is more apparent, than that the most inflexible animosities and distances from age to age have been among those who have in common worn the christian name. With respect to this event of things, though not the tendency of his doctrine, Christ foretold, that *he was not come to send peace upon earth, but a sword*, Matth. x. 34. That is, the various lusts and irregular inclinations of men, would so abuse his doctrine, that it would too often be made the occasion of violent contentions. But as to the proper design and natural tendency of his coming, the angels proclaimed at his appearance in flesh, that it was to send *peace upon earth*, Luke ii. 14. And so the precepts delivered by himself and his Apostles plainly declare.

And the way of peace among Christians seems to be as plainly declared in the Gospel, if we are but in a disposition to attend to it, as the way to peace between man and man in common.

Not by pretending to bring all Christians to a perfect uniformity of sentiments or practices in matters of religion. That was not in the

apostolical days themselves; nor can be hoped for, till we come to heaven.

Nor by arbitrary forms of agreement devised by men, and prescribed by some to others. There was more of the unity of the Spirit preserved in the bond of peace during the primitive times, before ever such methods were invented, than since the christian world has abounded with them. And if they had been thought necessary, certainly he who was faithful in all God's house, would either in person or by his Apostles have recommended them to the use of the Church.

But we are directed to look upon all as our fellow-Christians, *who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours,* 1 Cor. i. 2. *Who profess one body, one Spirit, one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,* Eph. iv. 4,—6. Nor can it be thought, that every difference of sentiment about every one of these particulars nulls men's Christianity. One would think, that now, when the Canon of Scripture is compleated, we should be ready to own all them for our fellow-Christians, who own the same sacred books as we do for the only and the perfect rule of christian faith and practice. Though they and we should differ in understanding many particulars contained in that rule; yet if we judge them *weak in the faith*, we are directed to *receive them, but not to doubtful disputations*, Rom. xv. 1.

What



What peace would it soon produce in the christian world, if hereupon such plain Gospel-rules as these were observed, among the several contending parties of Christians? *With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, to forbear one another in love, Eph. iv. 2. Not to judge our brother, or set at nought our brother, Rom. xiv. 10. but to judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way, ver. 13.* How happily would the face of the christian Church be altered, if all the members of it on all hands would make it a law to themselves, charitably to think others as sincere in their searches after truth, as we profess to be in ours, though they cannot see with our eyes? To avoid censuring others for differing from us, as we should complain of their censuring us where we think we are in the right? To remember, that they have a right to judge for themselves, as well as we; and that we are no more infallible than they? And hereupon to treat one another with brotherly love, notwithstanding our different persuasions?

These things, accompanied with a care to manage disputes in religion, when they fall out, with temper and moderation, to *give a reason of our hope and persuasion with meekness and fear*; and with a readiness to allow others to give a reason of their persuasions without taking offence at it, as we expect the like our selves: These things, I say, would go farthest to heal the breaches of the Church; and

and I doubt they will hardly be healed in this world by any other way.

IV. We are yet to consider the importance of a peaceable spirit in Christianity.

It has been already shewn to be frequently and strongly inculcated by way of precept; and therefore should be diligently attended to by all that call Christ Lord; for *why call ye him Lord, Lord, and do not the things which he says?* And it is many other ways recommended in the Gospel: As,

I. By shewing us the great evil of an unpeaceable spirit. It is the fruit of carnality, or of an undue ascendant which some fleshly motive or other hath over us, 1 Cor. iii. 3. *Ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?* And therefore *variance, emulations, wrath, strife*, are reckoned up among the *works of the flesh*, Gal. v. 20. And as a turbulent quarrelsome spirit hath a bad source, so it produces very ill effects. *Jam. iii. 16. Where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work.* When a quarrel is begun, however innocently at first on one side, yet it scarce ever happens in the progress of contention, but there come to be faults on both sides: Evil surmises, undue animosities, mutual reflections, indecent sallies of passion; it may be usefulness on all hands obstructed, and scandals multiplied, and the name of God and their holy vocation blasphemed, when quarrels  
rise

rise to a height among those who pretend to religion. Who can reckon up the many sins, and the many occasions of dishonour to God, which have their rise sometimes from a single and a small quarrel? And how few, when they reflect upon their own frames and actions, can remember a contest they have been engaged in, wherein they could altogether acquit themselves from blame through the whole procedure? Besides the sins of others, which they may have seen upon such occasions; have they not found their own spirits disturbed, their frames disordered in religious exercises, and that too often they have spoke unadvisedly with their lips? So justly does *Solomon* give that elegant representation, *Prov. xvii. 14. The beginning of strife is, as when one letteth out water*: If you take away the dams that keep in an impetuous torrent, you cannot foresee all the mischiefs it may produce: So it is when a quarrel is begun. *Therefore, if possible, as it follows, leave off contention, before it be meddled with.*

2. By representing a peaceable disposition in a very advantageous light. It is one of *the fruits of the blessed Spirit*, where he is pleased to take up his gracious residence, *Gal. v. 22.* It is mentioned as one principal thing, wherein *the spiritual kingdom of God*, or true religion in the hearts of men, consists, *Rom. xiv. 17.* Christ saw fit to make it the subject of one of his beatitudes, *Matth. v. 9. Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children*

*children of God.* They, who make it their business to promote the peace and welfare of mankind, and to settle those about them in general quiet and love, as far as it is in their power: Such men, resembling God in those attributes of his in which he so much glories, his goodness and love, shall be owned and received by him as eminently his children. The calm and composed soul, that is breathing love and peace, is in the best preparation to receive divine influences and favours; and accordingly they are peculiarly promised in such a frame, 2 Cor. xiii. 11. — *Live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*

3. By the lively expressions of such a temper in the example of Christ. He was, on the one hand, a pattern for observing the proper limitations to be attended to in all pursuits after peace: He ever preferred truth and duty to it, an obedience to his Father to the pleasing of men: And so must we. But on the other hand, as far as it was consistent with his higher engagements, he ever shewed a strong disposition to peace. Instead of offering injury to any, he made it his business to do good to all. He acted correspondent to the antient prophecy of him, that he *should not strive nor cry, neither should any man hear his voice in the streets*, Matth. xii. 19. He pursued his work without noise and contention, with-



without tumult and disturbance. And he discountenanced the beginnings of a strife among his followers, *Luke* xxii. 24, 25. Rather than *he would offend* the civil government, he paid tribute, though it was not due from him, as he declares, *Matth.* xvii. 27. And rather than he would offend the *Jewish* Priests, when he had miraculously cured a leper, he ordered him to go to the Priest, and carry him the gift prescribed by the law for the priests, when they were concerned in the cure of a leprosy, *Mat.* viii. 4. Our master came both preaching peace, and exemplifying our proper behaviour in order to it.

4. By the account it gives us of the heavenly world: As a state of perfect love and harmony, where there are no jarring notes and affections. When a good man dies, he *enters into peace*, *Isaiah* lvii. 2. Here possibly he had frequent occasion to lament the unsuccessfulness of his endeavours to obtain peace, and to mourn over the many bleeding wounds of the Church of Christ. But this is one circumstance, which makes heaven a delightful prospect, that he shall meet with an equal disposition to peace in all the other inhabitants, that the unity of the christian Church will be then compleated, and that all his own distempers, which make him not so peaceable now as he should be, shall be fully cured. Now surely this prospect

spect should excite our zeal to grow in such a temper now, as an eminent meetness for that world, and a similitude of temper to what prevails in it.

By way of reflection then,

1. This may be sufficient to vindicate Christianity, from the reproaches which have been cast upon it for the divisions and animosities that have abounded among Christians. The precepts, the pattern, the principles of Christianity, all lead another way, they directly lead to peaceableness. If it be asked then, *Whence come wars and fightings?* This question must be answered now, as it was by the Apostle James in the primitive times, James iv. 1. *Come they not hence, of your lusts that war in your members?* Pride, and ambition, and passion too often prevail and reign among many that wear the christian name: And there are too strong remains of these and other disorderly affections in the best.

2. This may be a proper subject of trial and self-examination. If we make no conscience of this duty of peaceableness, we have not yet entred into the spirit of true Christianity. And it will be one way to discern at least, whether vital religion is advancing or declining in us, by examining whether we are of a more peaceable or a more turbulent temper, than we were formerly.

S

3. Let

3. Let us all, as we are exhorted in the text, cultivate and exercise a peaceable and healing disposition. This is the likeliest way to dispose others to be at peace with us. The reason of the thing, the promise of God, and the ordinary course of experience shew this: And every man desires that others may be at peace with him, even such as contribute least toward it themselves. This will at least be an effectual means to secure peace in our own breast, under other people's undeserved unkindness and ill usage, if they have nothing against us except in the matters of our God. It will greatly credit our profession, and capacitate for the more extensive usefulness. And it will be one thing to soften a death-bed.

Therefore pray for the Spirit of grace, to make it a settled, habitual principle with you. Often meditate on the blessings, which insue from peace to soul and body. Cultivate the grace of humility, the want of which lies at the bottom of most contentions. Watch against every thing, which you find by experience to have a tendency to sow your spirits. And whatever difficulty you may find in ruling your own spirits for this purpose, or in bearing with the peevishness of others; remember, that this, and all the other parts of your warfare, will soon be over; and the prize you have in view, to be recognised hereafter as *the children of God*, will abundantly over-balance all your difficulties.

S E R M O N



## SERMON XII.

\*\*\*\*\*

### A merciful Temper.

\*\*\*\*\*

COLOSS. III. 12. The former part.

*Put on therefore, as the elect of God,  
holy and beloved, bowels of mer-  
cies.—*



Have chosen more than once already, in the course of my design, to make this verse my subject, for some branches of the christian temper mentioned in it; because it recommends the several particulars which it enumerates in the most advantageous light, as *parts of the new man*, wherein vital



Christianity consists; or as christian graces, which those who profess Christianity, are especially obliged to cultivate. As such, we are called to *put on bowels of mercies*, or a disposition to shew mercy to the proper objects of it. And here, as on several other heads, I shall 1<sup>st</sup>, Explain the disposition required. And 2<sup>dly</sup>, Shew the peculiar engagements that lie upon Christians to it.

I. The nature of the disposition required, expressed by *bowels of mercies*.

It may be thus described in general: It is a disposition of mind, whereby we are inclined tenderly to sympathize with others in their evils or dangers; and are ready to help and relieve them, as far as it is in our power.

The peculiar occasion for this grace is given by the *misery* of other people; either present distresses they are labouring under, or some evils to which we may discern them to be exposed. As there would have been no room for divine mercy, if misery had not made its entrance among creatures, either in actual feeling or in title; so without this there could be no place for the mercy of one man to another.

And as in other graces, so in this, we are principally to consider the temper of the mind. We are called to put on *bowels of mercy*: A tender, sympathizing spirit, apt to have a quick sense of other people's calamities and dangers, and to be nearly touched with them, and from that  
inward

SER. XII. *A merciful temper.* 261

inward charitable frame to do them all proper good offices. Actions, which carry the greatest appearance of compassion and mercy, if in truth they proceed not from such a temper of soul, will not meet with divine acceptance. And the Apostle intimates, that there may be such actions without a right principle, when he tells us, 1 Cor. xiii. 3. *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* This is one of the strongest evidences, whereby one man can proceed in his judgment of another, that he is of a merciful disposition, when he is content to give all that he has to relieve another man's necessity: And yet the Apostle intimates, that such a diffusion of visible charity may proceed from an ill spring; as, suppose, from ostentation, from a hope to compound with God by this means for other sins, from something beside a genuine sympathy with our neighbour. If this should be the case, the most pompous acts of beneficence would profit us nothing at the bar of Christ.

On the other hand, men may be esteemed by God really to possess the *bowels of mercy* which Christianity requires, though they are not in a capacity to give any bright proofs of it to men by sensible instances. A poor man may have the grace of a merciful disposition as truly as the richest, if he really sympathizes with his neighbour, and would do more if he had it in his power. For *if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that*

*a man hath, and not according to that he hath not,* 2 Cor. viii. 12. The temper of the mind then is first to be regarded.

But if there be such a disposition, it will not fail to express it self in merciful actions, in proportion to capacity and opportunity. The man, who can allow himself to act a barbarous and cruel part, or who ordinarily declines to act as bowels of mercy would lead him to do, certainly is not possessed of them. The christian scheme is so spiritual, as not to admit the acts of mercy for virtue without the disposition: But it is so just and consistent, as not to leave room for a pretence to the disposition, when the life and actions proclaim the contrary.

Now a compassionate and merciful temper to our neighbour, may be considered as leading to be affected and to act differently, according to several particular views we may take of the case of others. That is, in reference to their souls, and their spiritual miseries and dangers: Or in reference to their outward afflictions and sufferings, wherein we have no immediate concern of our own: Or lastly, in relation to any particular injuries they have done to our selves, by means of which they may lie at our mercy. By this way of considering mercy, the nature of it will, as I apprehend, be most plainly and practically explained.

I. It is to be exercised in reference to the souls of men, and their spiritual miseries and dangers. Here a Christian has abundant reason

for bowels of mercy and compassion to his fellow creatures; much more than he can have from any outward calamities that may befall them.

The sins of men, and the danger of their everlasting ruin by them, will awaken a lively concern and grief in the merciful mind of a Christian. He has the truest and justest compassion for his neighbour, who cannot without a tender sorrow see him provoking the great God to jealousy, throwing away his immortal soul, living under the full power of a mortal distemper, and laying up in store for a dreadful account. Whoever believes a reality in religion, must be much more affected with such a melancholy sight, than with seeing the bodily wants or consuming diseases of men, or with hearing their most dismal groans and mournful complaints upon any wordly account; because he knows, that the danger of their souls is infinitely greater. Such was the temper of the holy *Psalmist*, *Psal. cxix. 158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved, because they kept not thy law.* He was grieved for the dishonour to God; that was piety: And for the risque they run of their own ruin; that was charity and compassion to them.

But if this inward concern be sincere and genuine, it will shew it self in all proper endeavours, according to our ability and opportunity, to save them from sin and ruin. If we truly pity the ignorance of others, we shall be ready to instruct them, if we are able to do it, and they are willing to receive it; or take



pleasure in supporting others in such a work, who are more capable of helping them. If we are deeply affected with their danger, we shall gladly embrace any opportunity to give them faithful warning, and to *pull them out of the fire*, if we can, *Jud. 23*. Where our own influence cannot reach, we shall rejoice if by any means within our power we can engage others in so beneficial a design, who may be more capable and likely to succeed. This compassion for the souls of men, would give life to any project for supporting and propagating the Gospel, either by our immediate influence, or by our purses, or by any other way we can come at : It would make us immediate actors, or fond of bearing any part in any reforming design set on foot. And if we can have no farther influence, we should help all such designs by frequent and fervent prayer; for the propagation of the Gospel to the darkest and most distant corners of the earth, that it may *have free course and be glorified*: For our worst enemies, that they may be recovered to repentance : And even for such, of whose recovery we may have but very low hopes at present. Oh that there were more such merciful men to the souls of their fellow-creatures ! That more were inspired with this persuasion, that *if a man err, and one convert him, he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins*, *Jam. v. 19, 20*.

SER. XII. *A merciful temper.* 265

2. It is to be exercised in relation to the outward afflictions and sufferings of others, even where we may have no immediate concern. Any of the calamities and evils of life, to which men are liable, give opportunity for bowels of mercy: Their pains and diseases of body; their troubles and perplexities of mind; their necessitous circumstances of life, either in their ordinary course, or as reduced to them by disasters and disappointments; their unjust sufferings from other men, either for their consciences, or by common oppression and injustice; and even the sufferings and miseries, which men bring upon themselves by their own fault and folly. A merciful man will not think himself altogether unconcerned in any of these; though some of them, and in some cases, and with some particular views, may justly touch him more tenderly than others.

Here, as in the former case of the *souls* of others, mercifulness begins in the frame and temper of the mind. There should be an affecting sense of the distresses of others, a sympathy with them, and a charitable goodwill to them. He, who is wrapped up in himself, and regards not what calamities befall other people, as long as his own circumstances remain easy, is not human, much less acts like a Christian. Christianity teaches us to *look not only at our own things, but every man also on the things of others*, Phil. ii. 4. It is true, we are called to a more special sympathy with

with some than with others. The bonds of nature are not cancelled by Christianity, but strengthened; and therefore without doubt we are not only allowed, but obliged to a more particular sympathy with our relations, our acquaintance and friends. *To him that is afflicted, pity should be shewed from his friend,* from him especially, *Job vi. 14.* And ordinarily we are called to interest our selves in the sufferings of our fellow-Christians with more tenderness, than in the sufferings of the world at large: That *if one member* (of the christian body) *suffer, all the members suffer with it,* 1 Cor. xii. 26. And *Heb. xiii. 3. Remember them that are in bonds,* i. e. for righteousness sake, *as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity upon that account, as being your selves also in the body,* i. e. as belonging to the same body of Christ, to which they belong. But there is a general compassion and sympathy due to all men, as they come within our notice and reach, even to the worst of men. To rejoyce in the miseries of any as such, is most unchristian; and to have no manner of concern for them, is certainly at least a great defect in Christianity: For we are taught to *weep with them that weep,* without excluding any, *Rom. xii. 15.*

And where there is really such a disposition of mind, it will express it self in the proper instances and fruits of mercy. The *bowels of mercy* we are to put on, must not be *shut up*; as they are, if we satisfy our selves with a meer  
tender-

SER  
tend  
er to  
me  
som  
care  
stem  
of t  
coun  
injur  
sonal  
in pr  
be re  
as th  
out t  
breaa  
the a  
The  
of pr  
witho  
sister  
and o  
be ye  
ye gi  
ful to  
John  
love b  
17, 18  
seeth  
his bo  
eth th  
dren,  
[only]

tenderness of mind, when we have it in our power to contribute to their relief and help. The merciful will not think it too much to undergo some pain and labour, in order to soften the cares, or divert the pains, or remove the distempers, or solve the doubts and perplexities of their neighbours. They will chearfully encounter with some difficulties for righting the injured and oppressed, if they can have a reasonable prospect of success. And especially, in proportion to their circumstances, they will be ready to *draw out their soul to the hungry*, as the expression is, *Isa. lviii. 10. i. e. to draw out their inward compassion by dealing their bread to the hungry*, ver. 7. and by *satisfying the afflicted soul*, as far as they can, ver. 10. The Apostle *James* represents the absurdity of pretending to sympathy and compassion without this, *Jam. ii. 15, 16. If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?* And *St. John* exhorts us to shew the sincerity of our love by the feeling expressions of it, *1 Joh. iii. 17, 18. Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwel-eth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, or in tongue [only], but in deed and in truth.*

Where



Where people are not in a capacity for relieving the necessities of others themselves, they may exercise their compassion as acceptably to God, by applying to those who are more capable, if they have an interest in them; Whereby indeed they may serve *three* good purposes at once; pursue their own charitable temper, excite others to their duty, and help the distressed. Or if they should not know where to make application with prospect of success, yet all have one way left to express their disposition to mercy, which will be pleasing to God, and may be profitable to men; and that is by prayer to the Father of mercies on behalf of the distressed.

3. This temper should be exercised with respect to particular injuries done by others to our selves, upon account of which we may have them at our mercy. As, suppose, by injurious reflections upon our reputations, or by occasioning some damage to our substance, or in other ways of using us ill. This is a peculiar province for mercy to display it self.

Governors are not indeed obliged to shew mercy to such offenders, as endeavour to overturn the state, or disturb the publick peace, by forbearing to punish them according to their deserts. It is the duty of their office to be *terrors to evil-doers*, as well as *a praise to them that do well*. It is one of the greatest blessings of the present world, that there is such a power lodged somewhere in every society, to restrain those by the terror of punishment from evil actions, who will not forbear them upon prin-

SEE  
prin  
cuti  
law  
scar  
ther  
to g  
guil  
whe  
bloo  
wou  
by c  
and  
rega  
fend  
fore  
ment  
far at  
the f  
witho  
M  
injur  
I a  
cases  
endea  
tation  
upon  
is rem  
our se  
ment  
it is pa  
our se  
in such  
selves.

principle. And if there were not actual executions of punishment upon bold offenders, laws would soon lose all their force and be meer scare-crows, societies must be dissolved, and there could be no living in the world. Mercy to great offenders would in some cases intail guilt upon a land, as in the case of murder, where the law of God and nature require blood for blood. And in many other cases it would be the greatest cruelty to the community, by continuing it in danger from *roaring lions and ranging bears*, who *neither fear God nor regard man*; and by encouraging others to offend upon hope of impunity. It must therefore always be left to the wisdom and judgment of those in power, to determine how far at any time there may be a relaxation of the severity of laws in particular instances, without danger or prejudice to the community.

My view is to consider private and personal injuries. And here,

I am far from saying, that Christianity in all cases obliges us to put them up, without any endeavour to right our selves, either in our reputation or our property. Our usefulness depends upon our reputation; and therefore, when that is remarkably attacked, and we cannot vindicate our selves without the prosecution and punishment of those who unrighteously strike at it, it is past doubt that we may and ought to do our selves justice that way: Mercy to others in such circumstances would be injustice to our selves. And in case of injury done us in our  
pro-

Where people are not in a capacity for relieving the necessities of others themselves, they may exercise their compassion as acceptably to God, by applying to those who are more capable, if they have an interest in them: Whereby indeed they may serve *three* good purposes at once; pursue their own charitable temper, excite others to their duty, and help the distressed. Or if they should not know where to make application with prospect of success, yet all have one way left to express their disposition to mercy, which will be pleasing to God, and may be profitable to men; and that is by prayer to the Father of mercies on behalf of the distressed.

3. This temper should be exercised with respect to particular injuries done by others to our selves, upon account of which we may have them at our mercy. As, suppose, by injurious reflections upon our reputations, or by occasioning some damage to our substance, or in other ways of using us ill. This is a peculiar province for mercy to display it self.

Governors are not indeed obliged to shew mercy to such offenders, as endeavour to overturn the state, or disturb the publick peace, by forbearing to punish them according to their deserts. It is the duty of their office to be *terrors to evil-doers*, as well as *a praise to them that do well*. It is one of the greatest blessings of the present world, that there is such a power lodged somewhere in every society, to restrain those by the terror of punishment from evil actions, who will not forbear them upon prin-

SE  
prin  
cuti  
law  
scar  
ther  
to g  
guil  
wh  
bloo  
wou  
by c  
and  
rega  
fend  
fore  
men  
far a  
the f  
with  
M  
injur  
I a  
cases  
endea  
tation  
upon  
is rem  
our se  
ment  
it is pa  
our se  
in such  
selves.

principle. And if there were not actual executions of punishment upon bold offenders, laws would soon lose all their force and be meer scare-crows, societies must be dissolved, and there could be no living in the world. Mercy to great offenders would in some cases intail guilt upon a land, as in the case of murder, where the law of God and nature require blood for blood. And in many other cases it would be the greatest cruelty to the community, by continuing it in danger from *roaring lions and ranging bears*, who *neither fear God nor regard man*; and by encouraging others to offend upon hope of impunity. It must therefore always be left to the wisdom and judgment of those in power, to determine how far at any time there may be a relaxation of the severity of laws in particular instances, without danger or prejudice to the community.

My view is to consider private and personal injuries. And here,

I am far from saying, that Christianity in all cases obliges us to put them up, without any endeavour to right our selves, either in our reputation or our property. Our usefulness depends upon our reputation; and therefore, when that is remarkably attacked, and we cannot vindicate our selves without the prosecution and punishment of those who unrighteously strike at it, it is past doubt that we may and ought to do our selves justice that way: Mercy to others in such circumstances would be injustice to our selves. And in case of injury done us in our  
pro-



property, religion does not forbid us to take advantage of the laws of our countrey against lawless men: We should give an ill example, of mischievous consequence to the publick, if out of a foolish lenity we should give up our own rights, when they are not meerly our own, but stand connected with the rights of the society: Which is the case, when the crime is of a very pernicious tendency, and the person who commits it appears to be accustomed to it, and in no likely disposition to leave it.

But a merciful temper, when injuries are offered, should shew it self in such instances as these.

We should maintain a good-will to those who injure us, as far as is consistent with the publick safety and our own. We should be sorry for their sin, and heartily wish their repentance and everlasting welfare.

If there is any probable hope of their being reclaimed, we should try mild methods first to bring them to reason, and allow time for observing how they operate, before we come to extremities. *Charity suffereth long*, 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

If we have received prejudice by their means, but it was undesigned on their part; if in charity we have reason to pass that judgment; not only mercy, but justice requires us not to take any advantage we may have against them. If the providence of God has unexpectedly reduced them without their own visible

SE

fible

den

ver

face

I

but

obli

their

If

now

merc

what

If I c

bones

tream

the in

guilty

sue up

Mercy

and it

prevail

II.

ments,

mercifu

1. I

as a nec

vi. 36.

one to a

iii. 8. E

of anot

represen

ness, wh

SER. XII. *A merciful temper.* 271

sible fault, so as to disable them to answer our demands from them ; to treat them with severity in such a case, would be to fly in the face of providence.

If they have been designedly injurious to us, but give credible marks of repentance, we are obliged heartily to forgive them, whatever their offences have been.

If they have wronged us, but we know are now utterly incapable to make us reparation ; mercy will certainly prompt to be content with what can be had ; and never allow us to say, If I cannot have my debt, I will have the man's bones. Nor will it suffer us to proceed to extremum rigour in such circumstances, wherein the innocent must be deeply involved with the guilty, and the utter ruin of a family must issue upon carrying matters to the greatest height. Mercy in such a case should temper justice ; and it will do so, where a merciful disposition prevails.

II. I proceed to shew the peculiar engagements, that lye upon Christians, to be of a merciful disposition.

1. It is most frequently inculcated upon us as a necessary duty. By frequent precepts, *Luke vi. 36. Be ye merciful, Eph. iv. 32. Be kind one to another, forgiving one another. 1 Pet. iii. 8. Be of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful.* It is represented as an eminent branch of the goodness, which God requires of men. *He hath shewed*

*shewed thee, O man, what is good: And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy?* Mic. vi. 8. An unmerciful spirit is declared to be inconsistent with the love of God in the soul. *Who so shutteth the bowels of compassion, — how dwelleth the love of God in him?* 1 Joh. iii. 17. A tender sympathy is emphatically described as the fulfilling of Christ's law, *Gal. vi. 2. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

2. It is made an express term of our acceptance with God. *Psal. xviii. 25. With the merciful thou wilt shew thy self merciful.* Mat. v. 7. *Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.* Mat. vi. 14, 15. *If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* The same thing is represented in a very affecting parable, *Mat. xviii. 23, &c.* Wherein the king of heaven is described as calling his servants to an account, and out of compassion forgiving one of them a debt of ten thousand talents; while this same servant used the extreamest rigour to a fellow-servant, that owed him but an hundred pence: Whereupon his lord is represented after the manner of men, as recalling his forgiveness, and insisting afresh upon his debt to him with the utmost severity: To teach us, what our Lord delivers at the close as the moral of the parable, *ver. 35. So shall likewise my heavenly*  
*Father*

SER. XII. *A merciful temper.* 273

*Father do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* The process of the great day is directly described as turning eminently upon this point; both in the goodness and severity of God, *Matth. xxv. 34. to the end.* We are told on the one hand, *Jam. ii. 13. that he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy:* And on the other, that *God is not unrighteous, to forget any work or labour of love, shewed toward his name, in ministring to the saints, Heb. vi. 10.* Would to God, that all who name the name of Christ, would seriously lay to heart things so strongly and frequently said.

Nor is it any wonder, that this should be made an indispensable term of the divine favour, and of our eternal happiness, since—

3. We are most fully taught our own need of divine mercy. We have constant occasion for *mercy to pardon, and grace to help, Heb. iv. 16.* None of us can come to God as innocent creatures, but as penitents, who must be beholden to infinite mercy for the pardon of innumerable offences, and for the acceptance of our best services, and cannot hope for any benefit at his hands upon the foot of desert, but as the fruit of sovereign grace and favour. And can we come to God with a humble apprehension of our own guilt and unworthiness, and yet allow an unrelenting temper to our neighbour? How can we have the confidence in such a frame, to offer to God that petition

T

of



of the Lord's prayer, *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors?* The very request, coming from a hard-hearted and implacable man, is no better than to bespeak a denial. Can we be sensible, according to the elegant representation of the parable lately mentioned, that our debt to God is as *ten thousand talents*; and yet hesitate upon forgiving our neighbour the trifle of *an hundred pence*? That is a vast disproportion, but falls much beneath the reality of the case. Can we have the face to be petitioners for his compassion and indulgence every moment, and yet be obdurate to the cries of our fellow-creatures, or think it beneath us to have any regard for them in their wants and distresses?

4. God's actual mercy to us is therefore set in our view in the Gospel, as a pattern for this holy disposition. He is *the Father of mercies, rich in mercy; his tender mercies are over all his works.* He is *full of compassion.* The course of providence and redemption are the brightest demonstrations of it. He continually supplies our returning wants; often before we call upon him, and especially he satisfies our desires and answers our humble intreaties. He remembered us in the low estate of our apostacy, when no other eye pitied us, and no other hand could save us; and out of the riches of his grace gave his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins. All his mercy to us is disinterested; he never can have any need of us, as we may have of the meanest

est of our fellow-creatures; there was nothing but misery and necessity on our part to move his tender regard. He was highly provoked by us, so that resentment instead of relief might in all reason have been expected; yet then mercy rejoiced over judgment. Can I then *beseech* you to put on bowels of mercy, by any stronger argument than *by the mercies of God*? The Scripture dwells upon this consideration. *Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful*, Luke vi. 36. *Love your enemies, &c. that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*, Matth. v. 44, 45. *Be tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*, Eph. iv. 32.

5. The Son of God gave us a most illustrious pattern of mercy. This was his great inducement to veil his original glory, and to assume our nature; not our merit, but our misery. He came *to seek and save them that were lost*, to *save us from our sins*, and *from the wrath to come* due for them.

When he was actually made flesh, there never was such a pattern of mercy in our nature. Almost all his words and works breathed this.

How singular was his compassion to the souls of men? When he *saw them as sheep without a shepherd*, without proper and good instructors in the way to heaven, *he was*

*moved with compassion on them*, Matth. ix. 36. And that compassion induced him to be their unwearied instructor himself; to go about through their cities and villages preaching the doctrine of the kingdom, accommodating himself to their capacities and circumstances, taking every advantage to enlighten their minds, and remove their prejudices, and guide their feet in the way of peace. When any of his hearers perversely opposed the design of his instructions and miracles, he was *grieved for the hardness of their hearts*, Mark iii. 5. And when he plainly foresaw, that the body of the *Jewish* nation were about to fill up the measure of their iniquities by rejecting and crucifying him the Lord of glory, he shed tears of sorrow for them, because they would *not know the things of their peace*, till they were *hid from their eyes*, Luke xix. 41, 42.

His sympathy with men in their bodily wants and sorrows was also very conspicuous. We often read of his being *moved with compassion* upon several distressing occasions, and so being led to relieve them. From these bowels of tender mercy he was induced to heal a sick multitude, *Matth.* xiv. 13, 14. and to cure the blind men that cried after him, while the multitude rebuked them, *chap.* xx. 34. and to restore to life the only son of the woman of *Naim*, Luke vii. 12,—15. He bore an affectionate part with the mourners at *Lazarus's* grave; *he wept* and

SER. XII. *A merciful temper.* 277

and *groaned in spirit*, John xi. 35, 38. Every miracle that he wrought, was a relief to men in one or another distress; excepting two: One of which, in permitting the devils to enter the herd of swine, *Matth.* viii. was after an act of great mercy in delivering two men who had been sorely tormented by those devils; which was also an instance of mercy to the people of the countrey, who had been in continual danger before from those possessed men, *ver.* 28. And the other, of cursing a barren fig-tree, so that it immediately withered away, *Matth.* xxi. 19. was intended, with no considerable loss or prejudice to any, to warn his Disciples by an instructive emblem of the danger of unfruitfulness.

He was ready to perform kind offices to all sorts of people in distress, whether good or bad. Though he seemed more shy of relieving a Gentile during his personal ministry, and before the wall of partition was broken down, lest he should offend the *Jews*, to whom he was peculiarly sent; yet we find as illustrious a fruit of his gracious compassion to *the woman of Canaan*, as any in the Gospel-history, *Matth.* xv. 28. Even his enemies felt the benefit of his miraculous power; so he healed the ear of *Malchus* the high priest's servant, when he was among those who came to apprehend him.



He did not always stay for desire and application, but would even surprise a miserable object with the offer of his help. Thus he acted with reference to the man, who waited at the pool of *Bethesda*, and had an infirmity thirty eight years: *When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, wilt thou be made whole?* The impotent man not knowing him, only tells him his helpless case, but without expectation of a miraculous cure; but Christ pronounced the healing word, and made the poor man to feel its healing virtue, ere he was aware, *Joh. v. 5, — 9.* Such was his disposition to mercy.

And his benignity is not lessened now when he is passed into the heavens. For still we have not an high-priest, who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, *Heb. iv. 15.* As they are not out of the reach of his knowledge, so they still move his compassionate regard: And we may suppose him saying to us from heaven those gracious words under them, which he did to *St. Paul*, *2 Cor. xii. 9.* *My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* And upon the foot of the blessed discoveries of the Gospel, we look for his mercy unto eternal life, *Jude 21.*

Upon

and  
posit  
vage  
ready  
neces  
well-  
must  
sensib  
move  
intrea  
Of th  
guish  
but w  
the bl

2.

and be  
loved  
mercy.  
pretend  
ture, o  
mercy  
stances  
anity o  
fellowf  
them?  
need fo  
already  
have al  
same so

SER. XII. *A merciful temper.* 279

Upon the whole then,

1. If the Gospel lays us under so various, and so strong engagements to a merciful disposition, where shall the cruel and the savage appear? If a compassionate temper, ready to express it self in the kind and beneficent fruits of it, is made necessary to a well-grounded hope of God's favour; what must become of those who are perfectly insensible of the calamities of others, unmoved at their cries, and inexorable to their intreaties? Of the spiteful and malicious? Of the injurious oppressor, that *sees the anguish of his brother's soul, when he beseeches, but will not hear?* What must be the end of the bloody persecutor?

2. Let us then, *as the elect of God, holy and beloved*, as his peculiar people, and beloved children, studiously put on bowels of mercy. Shall others, who make no such pretence, be induced by a goodness of nature, or by some ignobler motives to shew mercy to the miserable in many amiable instances; and shall we, who profess Christianity or to be called into the kingdom and fellowship of God's dear Son, come behind them? We, who acknowledge our selves to need so much mercy from God; who have already received such rich fruits of it, and have all our future expectations from the same source? We, who are not encouraged

to hope for divine mercy without exercising it to our fellow-creatures? We, who are called the followers of the merciful Jesus? Certainly many of the Heathen world will rise up in judgment against those pretended Christians, who shut up the bowels of their compassion from their neighbour, and will condemn them.



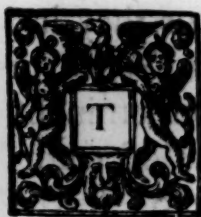


## SERMON XIII.

Veracity, or Truth between  
Man and Man.

EPHES. IV. 25.

*Wherefore putting away lying, speak  
every man truth with his neighbour;  
for we are members one of another.*



THE Apostle in some verses before the text had represented the gross corruptions that prevailed in the Gentile world; and then his charitable hope of the *Ephesians*, to whom he wrote, that they had learned Christ so, as to make them new men,  
quite



quite another sort of people in the temper of their spirits and the course of their conversation, from what they had once been themselves, and from what the body of the Heathens still were.

Having expressed such a charitable persuasion concerning them, he proceeds to exhort them to behave accordingly ; cautioning them against many sins, which abounded among those who had not yet received the knowledge of the truth ; and exciting to several particular duties, to which the new nature would prompt them. He begins with the exhortation in the text, to a strict regard for truth, or veracity.

This was a duty especially fit to be inculcated upon converts from Paganism ; not only as *lying*, among other evil practices, was common and customary every where among them ; but as some of their most celebrated masters of wisdom taught looser principles upon this head, than upon many other subjects of morality : They esteemed lying in many cases to be lawful and justifiable ; for which Dr. *Whitby* upon the place produces several passages out of their writings. It was therefore peculiarly suitable, that when the Apostle puts the *Ephesians* in mind of the better instructions they had learned from *the truth as it is in Jesus*, or from the Christian revelation, which eminently bears the character of a doctrine of truth ; he should begin with pressing them to a stricter regard to truth, than they had either practised or been taught before their conversion.

sion. And so he does in the words read. *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another.*

Upon this head it will be proper, 1<sup>st</sup>, To explain the precept here recommended to Christians, or the social duty which is prescribed by these words. 2<sup>dly</sup>, To consider the reason, which the Apostle gives for it. And then to close with a practical application.

I. I would explain and state the social duty, which is here recommended to Christians.

The Apostle for greater emphasis had described the general change made in the spirits and lives of Christians by the Gospel, both negatively and positively; by *putting off the old man, and putting on the new*, ver. 22, 24. In like manner he does for the same reason in reference to this particular virtue. On the one hand, he calls the *Ephesians* to *put away lying*; and on the other, to *speak every man truth with his neighbour*.

*Truth* in Scripture, and in common use, hath several acceptations. Sometimes it signifies *the real nature of things in themselves*: And that is the same, whether we think at all of it or not, however we judge about it; for our judgment cannot alter the nature of things. Sometimes it signifies *the conformity of our apprehensions to the nature of things*; that we conceive aright of them, and just as they really are: *Error* and *mistake* stand opposed to truth  
I in

in this sense. Every man, as far as he is concerned to think at all about things, should endeavour to judge as truly of them as he can, or agreeably to what they are in themselves; And when he speaks to his neighbour, he should communicate truth to him, in opposition to error, as far as he is able. But a man may vent error and mistake without the guilt of *lying*.

Therefore we must come to a *third* sense of *truth*; the *agreement of our words to our own sense and apprehension*: And *lying*, properly speaking, stands opposed to truth only in this signification. A man may speak the truth to his neighbour in this moral sense, and in the sense of the text, even when he is involuntarily mistaken: And on the other hand he may be guilty of the sin of lying, when he speaks to his neighbour that which is a real truth in it self, as long as he does not think it so. A man may be guilty of other sins, which will be ruinous to him in the day of account, when he judges amiss or contrary to the truth of things, under sufficient means of better information: God may condemn him for his sloth and negligence, or for his corrupt prejudices in such a case. But he is not directly and properly chargeable with the sin of lying, except when he speaks contrary to his own present sense and judgment.

Speaking, or writing, which is but another way of speaking, are intended to be means of communicating our minds one to another.

Lying

Lying is giving a false representation of our minds; speaking what we think to be false, to deceive others.

Both of these are to be taken in, for explaining this vice; that the matter of what we say is false, or different from what we believe to be true; and that it be spoken with intention to deceive him to whom we speak.

There may be *either* separately, without incurring the guilt of lying. It is not a lye, for instance, to repeat a known falshood in the way of narrative, as long as a man mentions it not as his own sense, but declares that he believes it to be false. Nor is it repugnant to veracity to use figurative expressions, which yet are not strictly true in the literal sense; as long as by common use or the manner of speaking the design of them is easy enough to be understood. As in the use of an *hyperbole*; or, when we exceed what is strictly true, either in magnifying or diminishing a thing, but every one at the same time may understand that it is intended for no more than a figure: So the Evangelist says, *Joh. xxi. 25. There are many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world it self could not contain the books that should be written.* Which none can understand to import any more, than that the books which must be written upon such a subject would be endless. So the use of an *ironical* way of speaking, is not inconsistent with veracity; that is, when the strict literal sense



sense of the words seems to signify one thing; but the circumstances of the case more plainly shew that the quite contrary is meant. As in *Elijah's* contest with the false prophets of *Baal*, when they had offered their sacrifice, and called upon their false god from morning till noon to send fire down to consume the sacrifice, *Elijah* did not think it unlawful or unbecoming to deride them and their god, that he might awaken them out of their stupidity, and shew their folly to all the people; by an irony, 1 Kin. xviii. 27. Cry aloud, says he, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. Here was no violation of truth; in saying in the manner and on the occasion that he said so, that *Baal* was a god. Every one that heard him, must understand him to mean the contrary in the strongest manner. In all figurative ways of speaking, it is necessary to their consistence with truth, that it be apparent they are intended for figures: And then if they are apt to express our minds to the hearer, they are words of truth; but break in upon truth, if they are intended to mislead him.

Nor is an intention to deceive others always criminal, if no falsehood be spoken for that purpose. It is not unlawful to deceive an enemy in war by a stratagem, though it would be so to assert a falsehood to him. I may foresee that my silence or forbearing to say all that I know of a matter will lead my neighbour into

a mis-

a mistake; and yet may lawfully forbear to inform him of the truth; yea in some cases it may be my duty not to do it: As, where a greater good requires, that he should be kept ignorant of it; Or sometimes for the sake of his own good; suppose, for instance, it is known that a sick person would refuse a medicine very likely to be of service to him, if he was acquainted what it was; certainly a physician, or a parent, or friend may very lawfully endeavour to deceive him by any method consistent with truth: Or if a matter is intrusted with me as a secret, and another would fain discover it who has no right to know it; if either by silence, or by a partial but true account I can divert his inquiry, it will be no violation of truth. *Jeremiah's* conduct may be an instance, *Jer. xxxviii.* He had been thrown into a filthy dungeon by King *Zedekiah*, at the instigation of the princes of *Judah*; but upon the intercession of *Ebed-melech* was admitted to a private audience of the King, wherein the main subject of his discourse was to acquaint the King with the mind of God for his direction in his present circumstances. The King at parting charges him to conceal this from the princes, and if they should come to examine him about the matter, that he should say unto them, *ver. 25, 26. I presented my supplication before the King, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to dye there.* And we are told, *ver. 27. that when the princes came to him, he told them accord-*  
*ing*

*ing to all these words that the King had commanded: So they left off speaking with him, for the matter was not perceived.* No doubt this was part of the conversation, and the King had commanded him to conceal the rest on pain of death; he was under no obligation to acquaint the princes with the rest; and he knew he should run the hazard of his life from them, if he informed them of the message which he had delivered from God to the King, because it was most disagreeable to their mind: And therefore he deceived them by letting them know only part of the truth. In this he was no way worthy of blame.

But to affirm any falshood in order to deceive others, is never justifiable. It is not lawful to lye for God, or for the greatest advantage that can be proposed by it to our neighbours, or to our selves. A mischievous lye, that is designed to the prejudice of any, is more heinous and aggravated upon other accounts, than an officious or a jocular lye: But lying in any kind is a violation of truth, which the best end proposed by it cannot justify. And that for this one reason, because we must *not do evil, that good may come*, Rom. iii. 8. That lying is always evil, will appear when I come to the second head.

But I would first be a little more particular in explaining this exhortation, by shewing how it is to be observed eminently in *three* cases. In common conversation. In bearing testimony. And in making and performing promises.

I. Truth

I. Truth is to be observed *in common conversation*. People have more especial need in some respects to be admonished of their obligations inviolably to maintain truth here: For many are more ready to allow themselves to transgress in what they account trivial instances than upon solemn occasions; and yet by such beginnings way is made for the disregard of truth in the most considerable matters in process of time. As men often proceed gradually from customary breach of their word, to break their oaths too at length; so when once a strict regard to truth upon common occasions is lost, it seldom remains long unshaken in cases of greater importance. The Scriptures, and, as we shall see presently, the reason of things also, oblige us to maintain truth inviolably and universally, without indulging ourselves in any sort of known falshood. The prohibition of lying both in old and new Testament is absolute. *Ye shall not lie one to another*, Lev. xix. 11. *Lie not one to another*, Col. iii. 9. And so is the injunction of truth. *Speak every man truth to his neighbour*, Zech. viii. 16. *Whatsoever things are true,—think on these things*, Phil. iv. 8. Such declarations of the mind of God leave us no license to make free with truth on the slightest occasions.

How common soever therefore the practice may be, we should not think our selves at liberty to make professions of kindness, where none at all is meant. Civility is one thing,

U

and



and fit to be professed and practised to all ; but profession of distinguishing respect and esteem is another thing ; and when there is nothing inward to answer it, is inconsistent with the candor and simplicity which should be found in a Christian. To give men commendations, which at the same time we think them not to deserve ; or to flatter them upon excellencies we do not esteem them possessed of, if they should pass with us for words of course now, yet I doubt will not pass so easily in the judgment.

There are a set of people, who think to commend themselves to those with whom they converse, by a surprising story of their own invention, or by pretending with a boasting air to things which they never did, or by magnifying matters beyond the bounds of probability ; and think any thing of this kind no more than a harmless amusement, as long as they avoid making free with their neighbour's character. Such facetious lies may not be a direct breach upon charity ; but they are a breach upon truth, and weaken men's regards for it : And certainly, if such inventions happen to produce some mirth and entertainment for the present in company, yet they can give neither a man nor his friend pleasure in the reflection, when it is known that all this hath no foundation of truth.

2. Truth should be maintained *in bearing testimony*. Many, who make no account of violating truth in a theme of common conversation,

versation, where they apprehend none to be injured ; yet cannot allow themselves to bear false witness, where they think their neighbour directly concerned, in his life, or property, or reputation, or other valuable interests. *A false witness that speaketh lies, and so soweth discord among brethren,* may as yet be an opprobrious name to some, who have not the universal regard to truth which they should have, because of the obvious mischief which accrues to society from a false witness. But I doubt some will incur this guilt in God's account, who reckon themselves clear of it.

A conscientious regard to truth will engage us to be very careful, that we spread nothing to the lessening or reproach of our neighbour, of which we have not good assurance : That we publish not a defamation upon hear-say, nor *take up* without sufficient grounds *a report against our neighbour.* This is the settled character of a citizen of *Zion*, *Psal. xv. 3.* Reports which we divulge, carry the authority of our names to support them, as far as that will go, farther than we bear our testimony against them. And if we hastily put an uncertain story we have heard out of our power by making it publick, we may prove the false witness of a scandal to many, who take it up upon our authority, without having either inclination or opportunity to examine the grounds we went upon.

If we are called to give publick testimony between man and man, a sincere respect to

truth, will engage to a careful recollection, before we give our testimony, what we can say upon the matter: It will dispose to lay aside affection on one hand, and prejudice on the other, and impartially to relate the true state of things, as far as we can bear witness to them: Nakedly to represent facts, as they have come within our notice.

Here we should think our selves obliged, not only to speak nothing but the truth, but to speak the whole truth, without concealment or disguise. Though we are not bound in every case to speak the whole truth; yet certainly when a matter depends either in whole or in part upon our evidence, and we come in as witnesses, we are bound not only to avoid all direct falsehood, but also not to omit any thing we can discover, which may give light into the true merits of the cause. This ought to be sacred to an honest man, when he is only heard upon his word, as well as when he is sworn to *speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*. If a matter should be wrong taken by a partial representation, and so a wrong judgment past in a cause; tho' we should have said nothing untrue as far as we went, yet we shall be justly accounted accessory to that wrong judgment by concealing what we had farther to offer: And thus partial evidence will have all the same evil effects, that evidence directly false can have.

3. Truth must be exercised *in our promises and engagements*. And veracity requires two things in relation to them. 1<sup>st</sup>, That

1<sup>st</sup>, That we really intend to perform them, when they are made. In matters, where we were at full liberty before, promises lay us under obligation, and give our neighbour a right; and therefore we should never allow our selves to make them, unless there be an intention to make them good. A citizen of *Zion* is careful of that, *Psal. xv. 2. He speaketh the truth in his heart.* He speaks according to the true meaning and design of his heart. To ingage to do a thing, when at the time of the ingagement we foresee that we cannot accomplish it, or have it not in our intention, is really to injure and impose upon our neighbour, and to wrong our own souls. We should not therefore be rash in making promises, but weigh beforehand the lawfulness, the practicableness, the expedience of what we undertake: For the same thing, which *Solomon* says of vows to God, will hold true of promises to men, *Eccl. v. 5. Better it is that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

2<sup>dly</sup>, That we are careful of performance, after they are made. This is as essential to veracity as the former.

Not but that there are some cases, which may supersede our obligation. If we are unexpectedly disabled afterwards by the providence of God, God and conscience, and all reasonable men, will discharge us from the guilt of falshood in not making our word good. We could only be supposed to promise, if we were



able. Or if we should be convinced, that the matter of our promise is unlawful; we must repent of our rashness in making it, and not add sin to sin by executing it. *Herod* ought with repentance to have broken even his oath, rather than have done so cruel and injurious a thing in pursuit of it, as beheading *John the Baptist*, if really that was included in his oath: Indeed he might more justly have given that wicked woman, who solicited it, the half of his kingdom, according to the letter of his promise, than the *Baptist's* head. And if unforeseen superior engagements require our attendance, at the time when a promise was to be performed, they must take place of it. As suppose you have undertaken to do a particular service to a person at such a time, but afterwards you understand that a wife or a child, or some in whom you have a near concern, are in danger of life without your immediate assistance; the promise is evidently superseded by higher engagements. No promise can be made in bar of all future contingencies, nor can release a man from that which the providence of God makes much more immediately his duty.

But veracity obliges to performance, when we lawfully may do it, when we are in a capacity, and not called off from it by much more evident duty. A lover of truth will not satisfy himself to have given his word, to be rid of present importunity, or to please his neighbour for the time, without any concern about the matter afterwards. Though the performance

in the event should prove a considerable damage to himself, and a disadvantageous bargain, yet he will not be a covenant-breaker. *He sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not,* Psal. xv. 4. If he is not able at present to make good his engagements, yet he will bear them in mind, and make conscience of performing them in case of restoration to capacity, though he should be under no obligation by human laws to do so.

II. I proceed to consider the reason which the Apostle gives for the inviolable maintenance of truth; *Because we are members one of another.* Which may be understood either as applicable to *mankind* in common, or to *Christians* in particular.

I. This argument is applicable to mankind in general. We are members one of another, as we partake of the same human nature, and in that respect are upon a level: We are members of society in common; intitled to the same rights, claims, and expectations one from another as men; and are mutually helpful and subservient, as the members of the body are each to other: And the principal link that holds us together, is mutual confidence, founded upon the hope of common fidelity.

Now lying makes void and useless the great instrument of society, the faculty of speech or writing. The power of speech was given us by our Creator, and the art of writing since found out, on purpose that we might be able

so to convey our sense to others, that they may discern it, where we pretend to express it, just as if they were so far privy to what passes in our minds. By these means, joined with the power of reason, man is a creature fitted for much more agreeable society than the inferior creatures are. But as far as the inward sense of our minds, when we profess to give it, is not faithfully conveyed; so far these means of union and correspondence between man and man, must necessarily become the means of disuniting and estranging them one from another.

Truth hereupon becomes a branch of righteousness, what every man hath a right to claim and expect from every man; as it is the proper and natural use of that instrument of society, which our common Maker has furnished us with for mutual good and service. And therefore *a righteous man hateth lying*, Prov. xiii. 5.

In fact it is what every man would expect and desire from another. The most common liar, the falsest witness, the most perfidious covenant-breaker, would have others speak the truth to him, and is ready to complain when they do not: And therefore by that obvious rule of equity, of doing as we would be done unto, every man has a right to expect and claim the same thing from us.

And unless truth be inviolably observed in every thing, the bonds of human society cannot fail to be weakned. If a man allows himself

self to throw off a regard to truth in one instance; when this is known, it is impossible that another should be assured where he will stop; and consequently mutual confidence must be destroyed. It is a man's profession that he esteems truth *sacred in it self*, and consequently *in all cases*, that is the security for his credibility upon his word *in any case*. As long as we cannot charge him with any violation of it, we are obliged to credit him. But when he is convicted of falshood; and especially if he declares that he thinks himself not bound to the observation of truth in some cases; as that *faith is not to be kept with hereticks*; or that he should not scruple a lie for its own sake, unless upon account of some farther mischief attending it: Then, I say, a man will justly be esteemed to disclaim the sacredness of truth in it self; and so his neighbour cannot believe him upon his bare word. It cannot be wondred at, that a known liar hardly meets with credit, even when he speaks truth: And so the least impeachment of a man's veracity justly weakens his credit, and others confidence in him.

Every man must be sensible, what universal mischief this brings upon the world, and how it destroys the comfort and benefit of society. See a melancholy description of it in the corrupt state of *Israel*, Jer. ix. 4, 5. *Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders.*



*slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.*

The sight of abounding falshood in the world brought in the use of *oaths*; in hope that by a direct appeal to God, and a solemn imprecation of his vengeance in case of perjury, men who are not restrained within the bounds of truth in common cases, might be awed into veracity upon important occasions by an immediate appeal to the great God. This practice in the present degenerate state of human nature is plainly countenanced by God in Scripture; and by the general consent of all civilized nations *an oath for confirmation is an end of all strife*, Heb. vi. 16. as the last appeal which men can make, and therefore the highest test of their veracity. And if men can allow themselves to falsify not only their word, but their oath, there is nothing by which they can be held, nor any security they can give to society, and therefore must forfeit all the benefits of it, as such who are not capable members of it.

But we should consider our selves as always under the eye of God, as well in what we say as in what we swear. If this was the general temper, there would be no occasion for the solemnity of oaths: And if men lose sight of this in common life, so as contentedly and customarily to prostitute truth, even where there is no direct appeal to God; their oath it self  
will

will hardly be sufficient to produce a full confidence in their veracity.

2. This argument may be particularly applicable to Christians. *We are members one of another*, in a more distinguishing sense, as we belong to the body of Christ. And this lays additional engagements upon all the visible members of that body to *put away lying, and to speak the truth one to the other.*

In conformity to the common Father, to whom we belong. Who is eminently stiled a *God of truth*, Deut. xxxii. 4. *His words are true*, 2 Sam. vii. 28. *Psal. cxix. 160.* They are not only agreeable to the true nature of things, but are suited to convey the divine mind plainly and without disguise to us. His promises are sure and certain, such as may firmly be relied upon. Falshood is as impossible to him as any other imperfection. *God is not a man, that he should lie*, Numb. xxiii. 19. His *promise* and his *oath* are *two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie.* And if this is a perfection so essential to the blessed God, in which he so much glories, and which we have so much reason to venerate in him; if we are born of him, we shall study imitation. Therefore his children are described as *children that will not lie*, Isa. lxiii. 8. Liars, we are told, belong to another father, *Joh. viii. 44. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.— There is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own;*

*own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.* This character is fixed upon him, as he pronounced the first lie, that we find upon record in the Bible; when he told our first parents, *Ye shall not surely die*, Gen. iii. 4.

In conformity to our Head, the Lord Jesus, there should be a strict observation of truth among Christians. He came into the world *to bear witness to it*, Joh. xviii. 37. And he was and is *the faithful and true witness*; revealing the mind of God with the greatest exactness, and having *no guile found in his mouth*, in any part of his conversation.

In conformity to the Spirit, that animates us, who is eminently described by this attribute, *the Spirit of truth*, Joh. xiv. 17. chap. xv. 26. Whose revelations are contained in *the Scriptures of truth*, Dan. x. 21. Where *that which is written is upright, even words of truth*. And therefore those, who are taught by him, should shew it by the strictest regard to that which is made his noted character in Scripture. This is therefore particularly described to be his fruit, *Eph. v. 9. The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth*. Which leads on to observe, that Christians are under strong engagements to veracity,

Because of the stress laid upon it in the rule, by which all the members of Christ's body are to be governed. The observation of truth is prescribed there in the strongest and most unlimited terms, as has been shewn. It is re-

com.

commended by the clearest expressions of God's approbation, *Prov. xii. 22. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly, are his delight.* And eternal death is expressly denounced as the portion of *liars*. They bring up the rear in the catalogue of those who *shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone*, *Rev. xxi. 8.* Whosoever *maketh a lie, shall in no wise enter into the heavenly Jerusalem*, *ver. 27.* And the same is said of *whosoever loveth and maketh a lie*, *chap. xxii. 15.*

### I N F E R E N C E S.

1. This is one remarkable evidence, how much Christianity is calculated for the benefit of mankind and the good of society at present, as well as for our everlasting welfare: In that it so strictly enjoins and enforces the exactest regard to truth. No man can be insensible that this would contribute greatly to the happiness and comfort of life, if every man conversed with another without deceit and guile, so that there was no occasion for just jealousies and suspicions. The christian religion written in the heart will form a man to this.

2. We may see from hence, upon how good reason the christian religion strictly forbids *common swearing*. So our Saviour himself does, *Matth. v. 34, 37. I say unto you, swear not at all. — But let your communication be yea, yea, nay, nay; for whatsoever is*  

†

*more*



*more than these, cometh of evil.* The same precept for substance is repeated by the Apostle *James*, chap. v. 12.

Not that we are to understand either Christ or the Apostle as intending to represent an oath to be unlawful in all cases. However absolute the expressions may seem, *swear not at all*; we cannot suppose them to forbid us to bear solemn testimony, or to give solemn assurances of fidelity upon oath, when called to either by lawful authority; since these were with God's countenance and by his appointment used in the Church of God from the first ages of the world; and the Apostle after the precept of our Saviour countenances the use of *an oath for confirmation and to end strife*, Heb. vi. 16. Nor are all appeals to God, performed with seriousness and upon important occasions, even without the call of the magistrate, to be supposed unlawful to a Christian. We have many instances of such appeals or oaths made by the Apostle *Paul* in his inspired writings; \* who certainly knew, and would not transgress the mind of Christ in this matter.

The meaning then of these passages is to forbid all swearing in ordinary discourse and conversation; that we should satisfy our selves with a bare affirmation or denial of a thing, and not be ready at every turn to appeal to God

---

\* See 2 Cor. i. 23. chap. xi. 31. Gal. i. 20. Rom. i. 9.

for the truth of what we say, unless we are lawfully called to it: Nor use any of those methods of asseveration, which may be esteemed petty oaths, as *by heaven*, or the like; several of which both our Saviour and the Apostle particularly mention; pointing to the practice of many of the *Jews*, who thought it lawful to swear by other things, as long as they used not the name of God. Instead of this, we are directed to go no farther in common converse than bare asserting or disowning a thing.

And the reason is obvious; Christianity most strictly enjoins veracity upon all Christ's followers; that they should have such an exact regard to truth in all they say, that they may deserve to be believed upon their word. He, who does not so behave as to deserve credit upon this foundation in common affairs, can hardly be more regarded upon the light and negligent use of an oath, which is the best that can be said of common swearing: And at the same time he depreiates the solemnity of an oath in extraordinary cases by taking the name of God in vain, so as to give ground to fear that he trifles with it then, as well as in common converse.

3. All that name the name of Christ, are concerned to see, that they comply with the exhortation in the text. *If any man seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue*, particularly from lying, surely *that man's religion*  
is

*is vain.* And therefore we should use the most effectual means to secure our veracity.

We should maintain a constant sense of the great evil of falshood, and of the excellence of truth: As the one is contrary to the God of truth, and the other his image; the one destructive of society, and the other the greatest strength and security to it.

We should be upon our guard against every thing, that may be a temptation to falshood. Guilt needs a lie to excuse it. Covetousness may prompt to falshood for gratifying it; but a wo is intailed upon all such gains, *Prov. xxi. 6. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue, is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.* Malice and ill-will sometimes lead to false charges to support them, when the reputation of an adversary cannot be sunk by true accusations. And rash speaking often betrays into falshood at unawares. All these therefore should carefully be guarded against by every lover of truth.

We ought to take heed of any *appearance of evil* in this case: To keep at a remote distance from any thing that borders upon falshood. This is the surest way to avoid any vice.

And, as in the practice of every other duty, and the avoidance of every other sin, so here we should join prayer to God with our own care and endeavours, in such language as that of the *Psalmist*, *Psal cxix. 29. Remove far*

*far from me the way of lying, and grant me thy law graciously.*

4. Christians should do all they can to promote truth among others : Both for the honour of God, and the spiritual and eternal good of their neighbours, and the general interest of society.

Such as have the care of youth, should with the utmost and the most early care impress upon their minds their indispensible obligations to maintain truth inviolate : They should let them know by their conduct, that a lie is to be reckoned a greater fault, than most of those which they may intend to excuse by it ; at least that any crime is more easily to be passed over by it self, than as aggravated by a covering of falsehood.

Falseness should upon all occasions be discountenanced. A Christian should resolve with the *Psalmist*, that *he that telleth lies, shall not dwell in his sight*, *Psalm*. ci. 7. He should frown upon the backbiter, and *not give heed to false lips*. He should countenance plain-dealing in all ; and both express a just abhorrence of flattery, and a real liking of frankness and openness, tho' it should be shewn in truths that bear hard upon himself.







# SERMON XIV.

Charitable judging, in opposition to censoriousness.

MATTH. VII. I.

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*



**A**MONG the many important rules delivered by our Saviour in his comprehensive sermon on the mount, there are not many more needful in every Age of the world than this. It was peculiarly suitable to the *Jews*, who were eminently censorious of all

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 307

all who were not of their nation and religion. And the same spirit of bigotry closely adhered to those of them who imbraced Christianity, after Christ had set up his Church and kingdom, in relation to the *Gentile* converts; so that there was occasion frequently to repeat to them such an admonition as that in the text, which we find done in several of the apostolical epistles. And, God knows, the same evil temper abounds in every age of the christian Church, so that the like caution is never unreasonable.

In the prosecution of the subject, I would  
1<sup>st</sup>, Explain what is here forbidden. And 2<sup>dly</sup>,  
The motive, by which the prohibition is enforced.

I. It is needful to explain this prohibition of our Lord and Master; in what sense we are to understand him, when he says, *judge not*.

The words in themselves are very general; but the sense of them may easily be understood, if we look into the context, and compare them with other Scriptures.

Nothing is plainer, than that Christ intends not absolutely to forbid any to use their own judgments. *Judging* is a natural faculty, which God hath given us all as rational creatures, and which he expects us to use in the best manner we can, according to every natural and acquired advantage for it, each of us for himself, to conduct us in the affairs of this world and in our way to a better. We act no farther as reason-

able creatures, either in civil concerns or in those of religion, than we act upon our own judgments.

But it is *judging of other people*, which is the subject of the text; passing a judgment concerning their words or actions or intentions. The 3<sup>d</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>, verses of this chapter plainly shew, that it is *our brother*, that is, any other man, who is concerned in the judging spoken of.

And though the word it self doth not limit the sense either to judging *well* or *ill* of him; yet the use of it in the new Testament confines the meaning to *judging ill*, or censuring him.

And yet even *all such* judging of our neighbour is not designed to be forbidden.

The censure of the magistrate upon criminals, that disturb the publick peace, and his punishing of them when found guilty, is so far from being discountenanced, that it is absolutely necessary to the good of civil society. Magistrates are instituted by God to be *a terror to evil-doers*: And they are justly worthy of blame, when they *bear the sword in vain*, by not *executing judgment* upon notorious offenders; which by the precept of God in Scripture, and by the claim of the society in which they are, is their proper province.

Ministers and christian societies are not debarred from censuring those in the way of censure which Christ has appointed them, who are of their own body, or who offer themselves to

be

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 309

be members of it, by denying them christian communion with them, if they notoriously break the laws of Christ. This sort of judging is made a duty by the Gospel-rule, *not to keep company, in christian society, with any man that is called a brother, if he be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, 1 Cor. v. 11.* This is called *judging them that are within*, ver. 12. judging them according to the rule of Christ to be unfit for christian communion.

It is not unlawful for private persons to entertain a fear, that evils may possibly be committed by those in whom they have a concern, by means of the temptations which are known to attend their circumstances; that is, such a fear as may awaken prayer and endeavours for their good. *It may be*, says *Job* of his sons, when they had been feasting together, *they have sinned*; and therefore *he offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all.* Job i. 5. And the Apostles express their fears of the Christians, to whom they wrote, and gave them the most awful cautions accordingly, when at the same time they expressed a charitable hope of better things. *I fear*, says *St. Paul* of the *Corinthians*, 2 Epist. xi. 3. *Lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.* So he warns the *Hebrews* of the dreadful danger of apostacy, and of the sad effects to be expected from unfruitfulness under the advan-



tages of the Gospel; and yet tells them, that *he was persuaded better things of them, and things that accompany salvation, though he thus spoke*, Heb. vi. 4,—9. Fear and concern for others, that arises from a sense of their danger, is the fruit of true charity, consistent with a good opinion, and very different from actual censures without a good foundation.

We shall not be chargeable with censoriousness for judging any thing erroneous in the professed sentiment of others, or amiss in their practice, which really appears so to us. If we believe our selves in the right, we cannot but judge those who differ from us in the wrong: There is no uncharitableness in this; nor in endeavouring by fair reasoning to convince them of what we judge their mistake, or by fair reproof and advice to use our best endeavours that *sin may not lie upon them*.

And to go a step farther, we are not forbid to judge those to be ill men, who give flagrant proofs of it by a course of evil actions, and whose *sins go beforehand to judgment*.

But the judging, which we should avoid, may, I think, be reduced to the *four* following heads; *pragmatical, rash, partial, and uncharitable* judging.

I. *Pragmatical judging* is carefully to be avoided. We should not officiously pass our condemning sentence upon any persons or things without just warrant and authority.

Thus, to censure things *out of our province*, where we have no concern or call to pass any judgment

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 311

Judgment at all, is a busy intermeddling. Many things may be proper for the cognizance and animadversion of the magistrate, with which private members of the community have nothing to do. Christ by his own example has taught us to consider, whether a thing be within our province, before we meddle with it. When a person said to him, *Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me*; Jesus answered, *Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?* Luke xii. 13, 14. "It is none of my province, whose kingdom is not of this world, to determine disputes about civil rights between you and your brother; but it belongs to the magistrate; and therefore I will have nothing to do with it." Thus the Apostle, 1 Cor. v. 12. *What have I to do, says he, to judge them that are without?* It was his province so far to judge them who were *within* the pale of the christian Church, as to declare the mind of Christ for denying them christian communion who are notoriously scandalous, and accordingly he directs the *Corinthian* Church to take care that this should be done. But for those who were *without*, and pretended not to christian communion, the christian Church had nothing to do with them.

Another instance of pragmatical censure, is, when men take upon them to judge of things *above their reach*; either from the defectiveness of their own capacity and furniture compared with others, or from the obscurity and

unsearchableness of the matter, upon which they pretend to pass a judgment. Men discover only their own ignorance and ill-nature, when they go beyond their depth in censure. As if, suppose, people of weak capacities and who have had a very contracted education and acquaintance, should at every turn be arraigning the conduct of their rulers, while in truth they are by no means capable judges: If they knew the springs of action, or the many difficulties under which an administration may labour, it may be they might discern either wisdom or unavoidable necessity in the steps they blame. The same may be said of many other reflections and censures upon men and things, wherein very often the most clamorous fault-finders *speakevil of things which they understand not*, and they betray their folly to wiser and more competent judges. There are other things, in which no man can pass a certain judgment concerning another; such are the secrets of the heart, the thoughts and intentions. And yet how ready are people to judge of these in the most censorious manner, as if they had a window into their neighbour's heart, tho' we must all acknowledge that the heart of man is unsearchable?

A farther instance especially worthy of our notice upon this head is, when men take upon them to censure others *without the authority of their rule*. He would be an ill judge, who judges not according to law, but condemns men for things merely because he does not like



SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 313

like them, though the law leaves them indifferent; or passes a heavier censure upon them than the law does. It would be equally unjust in us, and going out of our way, if we censure any as guilty of a crime, because they happen not to think and act as we do, while we have no warrant from the word of God to pronounce it a crime. We must not make sins and duties, which God has never made so; we ought not to do so to our selves by indulging unreasonable scruples; much less should we pretend to do it for other people. We must no more add to our rule, than diminish from it. A thing may appear doubtful to us, and then it will be proper that we should forbear it; but we must not pretend to condemn others for any such liberties which we cannot prove that God has made unlawful, much less for not conforming to us in things which we confess that God hath left indifferent. The Apostles had frequent occasion in the beginning of Christianity, to caution the converted *Jews* against censuring the *Gentile* converts without warrant from the christian rule. The *Jewish* converts would have had the *Gentiles* to observe the ceremonial law along with the christian institution. The Apostles shewed, that Christ had superseded this law, as indeed the *Gentiles* were never obliged to observe it. Therefore says St. Paul, Rom. xiv. 3. *Let not him which eateth not the meats forbidden by the law of Moses, judge him that eateth them, as prophane on that account, or not accepted*



cepted of God; for God hath received him. And, ver. 13. *Let us not therefore judge one another any more.* To the same purpose, Col. ii. 16, 17. *Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days; which were a shadow of good things to come.* This prohibition is founded upon the declaration in ver. 14. that Christ had *blotted out the hand-writing of these ordinances, and taken them away, nailing them to his cross;* therefore let no man judge another for not observing them. The Apostle James very emphatically represents the great evil of such censures, Jam. iv. 11, 12. *Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, that is, as we must plainly understand him, for such things as the law of Christ allows; (he seems to have the same case in view, as Paul had in the places mentioned:)* He that condemns his brother for such things, *speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law,* he censures the law as imperfect for not having forbidden such things. *But if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.* Thou actest not as one under law to Christ, but who settest up for a censor of his law. Now *there is one law giver, that is, Christ, who is able to save and to destroy, and so to confirm his laws with proper sanctions: Who art thou then that judgest another?* This passage plainly represents the pragmaticalness and arrogance of censuring men for any thing, where

SER

where  
fore  
ther  
give  
for a  
conc  
upon  
to an

2.

guar  
that  
cipit  
evid  
must  
sation  
on h  
repor  
ough  
with  
their  
deter  
that is  
and  
law o  
heard  
Doth  
him,  
ment  
law,  
the R  
that  
face t  
himself

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 315

where we have not the law of Christ going before us: For Christ, and not we, or any other man or men in the world, is the sole law-giver in matters of religion: But to censure men for any thing, which he hath not thought fit to condemn, or beyond the censure he hath passed upon it, is to usurp his place of a law-giver, and to arraign his law as imperfect and insufficient.

2. *Blind and rash judging* is also to be guarded against. We should be very careful, that we condemn not men in the dark or precipitately, before we have clear and reasonable evidence of facts and their circumstances. We must not presume to raise suspicions into accusations, or to judge hardly of men merely upon hearsay and common fame, or to *take up a report against our neighbour*. A judgment ought not to be formed to men's disadvantage, without knowing what they have to say in their own defence. *He that answereth, or determineth a matter before he heareth it, all that is necessary to give light into it, it is folly and shame unto him*, Prov. xviii. 13. The law of Moses required, that a man should be heard in his own vindication, *Job. vii. 51. Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doth?* So Festus mentions it in commendation of the Roman law, *Acts xxv. 16. It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused, have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.*  
And

And it is the law of Christ, *not to receive an accusation against an elder* ; the reason of the thing will suggest the same as to others, that an accusation should not be regarded against any *under two or three witnesses*, 1 Tim. v. 19. Certainly justice requires, that such precautions should be taken before private reflections as well as publick censures. Wherever we take upon us to be judges and censors, we should reckon our selves obliged to obtain good assurance of the truth of facts ; or else we should be wholly silent, and let the matter alone, as none of our business. What a vast number of censures would be stifled in the birth, if such measures were conscientiously observed ?

Another thing deserves consideration upon this head. We shall be guilty of rash judging, if we condemn men without being apprised of the particular circumstances that led them to the actions in question. The same thing may be lawful and even commendable in some circumstances, which in others would be worthy of blame ; or at least may deserve a milder censure, if it cannot be wholly vindicated. And we shall judge very rashly, if we make not allowances for the special differences of people's case, in judging of their actions. The *Pharisees* censured Christ's disciples for plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath day, *Mat. xii.* as if it was a criminal violation of that sacred rest ; not considering their hunger, and that such a slight refreshment fitted them for the service



SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 317

service of the day, instead of breaking in upon it, and that God *will have mercy* rather than *sacrifice*, as our Saviour argues. The circumstances of men in innumerable instances quite alter the moral nature of actions, and in others make a vast difference in degrees of guilt: And he is an unjust and hasty judge, who censures at random without taking these things into consideration.

3. *Partial judging* is also forbidden. When either the judgment we form proceeds from pique or dislike of the person, rather than abhorrence of evil; or when it is not equally extended to all who are equally concerned.

If we should censure others for a thing, with which we are equally chargeable ourselves, though it be really faulty, yet the censure would come very ill from us. It is intolerable to reproach another with drunkenness, or cheating, or idleness, or covetousness, if at the same time you are guilty of the same crimes, *Rom. ii. 1. Thou art inexcusable, O Man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thy self; for thou that judgest, dost the same thing.* Can you forbear blushing, while you reprove or reproach them upon such an account? And this indeed greatly aggravates any scandals given by magistrates or ministers, by parents or heads of families, or by any whose province or profession it peculiarly is to bear testimony against the sins of others. Upon this account the Apostle expostulates with  
the



the *Jews*, who valued themselves upon knowing much more than the *Gentiles*, and were ready to pass severe censures on them, *Rom. ii. 21, &c. Thou which teachest another, teachest thou not thy self? Thou which preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?*

If we censure smaller faults in others, with more rigour than we do greater of our own, though they should not be just of the same kind, it is very unjust and unequal. If we are quick at observing, according to our Saviour's allusion, a mote in our brother's eye, but are insensible of a beam in our own: To such Christ addresses in this context, *ver. 5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.* It is odious both to God and man, to animadvert rigorously upon the blemishes of others, when our own character is sullied with blacker stains.

If we censure that strongly in an adversary, which passes for little or nothing in a friend. If that shall be represented as a heinous crime in a man we do not like, who follows not with us or is not of our party, which can be easily overlooked in a favourite or a man attached to us; this is judging with respect of persons, which is a very bad character of a judge.

4. *Uncharitable judging* is also to be guarded against: All such censures as are not agreeable to the rules that candor and charity would prescribe.

If

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 319

If we give way to suspicions and jealousies of people at random, without any proper foundations to support them. These are the *evil surmizings* spoken of in 1 *Tim.* vi. 4. Whereas *charity thinketh no evil*, till obliged by evidence, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 5.

When we put the worst constructions upon actions, while they will admit of better. The People of *Israel* were too hasty in this matter with reference to their brethren of the two tribes and an half, who, when they were settled on one side of *Jordan*, built an altar there for a good and lawful end. The other tribes immediately upon the news of it conclude, but too uncharitably, that they had built this altar to turn away from following the Lord: Whereas they soon found, that no such thing was intended. The story is in *Josh.* xxii. There was some zeal for the true religion in these resenting tribes, but they put too rigorous and invidious a construction upon an innocent action of their brethren; and it was like to have had ill effects, for they resolved at first to *go up to war against them*, ver. 12. But their heat subsided, and they had so much prudence, before they executed their resolution, as to send a deputation to know the truth of the case, who soon found that they had put much too hard an interpretation upon the conduct of their brethren.

If we take upon us to judge of men's thoughts and intentions, while we can find nothing to reproach in their actions. As such  
censures

censures are pragmatical, so they are highly uncharitable. We should hope their ends and principles are good, when their actions are regular. To insinuate the contrary, is indeed a direct imitation of the devil, who is the most flaming instance upon record of such vile uncharitableness, in the case of *Job*. God had blessed *Job* with a course of great prosperity: *Satan* therefore would insinuate his religion to be intirely mercenary; *Job* i. 9. *Doth Job serve God for nought?* It was indeed a possible supposition, for all that men could know, that *Job* might not be sincere; but it was a vile suggestion to insinuate that this was fact, when all external appearances were otherwise. So bad a president should effectually set every honest man against the imitation of it.

When we venture to judge of men's state and condition in reference to divine acceptance, upon grounds which are not decisive by the exprefs rules of the Gospel: Either on account of mistaken opinions in religion, or some faults in practice. We know not how far these may consist with sincerity in other people; nor what allowances the great judge of all may see fit to make in particular circumstances, which are obvious to his notice, though they escape ours; nor is it any part of our business to enter into this matter.

If we censure men in the lump, as if there was nothing valuable in them, over-looking many commendable excellences, because of some real or supposed faults in them; this is

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 321

not charitable. How often is it seen, that a man once highly caressed and commended, shall presently be run down and disgraced by the same persons, if he happen to differ with them in some favoured notion, or even in a point of conduct? All his merits and amiable qualities are forgotten, and all must be done to blacken him. This is vile uncharitableness.

When we impute to others opinions and consequences that they disown. It is very lawful and charitable to endeavour to shew men whom we think mistaken, that such or such consequences follow from their avowed opinions; this is one proper mean to convince them of their error. But it is uncharitable and injurious to charge them with actually holding those very consequences, when they utterly disown them, and profess that they see not their connection with their principles.

To interpret calamities that befall people, as special judgments of God for something we dislike in them, without very clear and full evidence to support such a persuasion, can by no means escape the imputation of uncharitableness. Alas! these constructions are much more frequently the language of passion, and prejudice, and private resentment, than of reason or true religion. The judgments of God are a great deep; and it is very seldom that we can safely pronounce, that God intended to bear testimony against

Y

gainst



gainst this or that sin of another, in the afflictions that come upon them in the course of his Providence. But angry men serve their purposes by such bold reflections, inflaming others against people whom they dislike by this uncharitable supposition, that they are declared to be hated of God, and that he interests himself in their quarrels. Christ cautions his hearers against forming such dangerous conclusions from the calamities of others, directing them not to think men upon that account greater sinners than their neighbours, *Luke xiii. 1, — 4.*

If we are unready to admit fair tokens of repentance even for real faults, this is uncharitable. It is a temper too frequent, if people have done ill things, presently to judge them incurable; if they are seduced into that which we think a dangerous error, to give them over. Whereas at the worst *charity hopeth all things*, 1 Cor. xiii. 7. that if any are otherwise-minded from what we esteem important truth, if they give us ground in charity to believe their integrity, *God shall reveal even this unto them*, Phil iii. 15. And if men own their faults or mistakes, while uncharitable jealousy may surmise many objections in the way of crediting them, charity will not enter into secret things that belong to God; but gladly *restore a man that is overtaken with a fault in the spirit of meekness*.

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 323

To publish the real faults of others without a just occasion, is carrying our judgment beyond the bounds of charity. If we can hope to reclaim them by private admonition, we should not chuse to proceed farther to their disadvantage. To bring them upon the publick stage, and expose them to the censure of others, where the welfare of our neighbour or publick justice do not require it, serves no good end. That which we render, charity *beareth all things*, 1 Cor. xiii. 7. *κρύπτει*, would be more properly rendred, *concealeth all things*. Which falls in with St. Peter's observation, that *charity covereth a multitude of sins*, 1 Pet. iv. 8.

And to add one instance more ; When innocent people are involved in a censure with the guilty, this is a notorious breach of charity. A whole party shall suffer reproach for the crime of a single man, who happened to bear the same name of religious distinction with them : Or a whole profession shall be insulted for the knavery or unjustifiable practices of some particular men belonging to it. This method of judging would leave no bounds to censoriousness. Every man's faults should be laid at his own door, and be no farther imputed to any other, than as their avowed principles directly justify them, or they can be proved to be actual confederates in the practice.

II. I proceed to consider the motive, by  
Y 2
which

which this prohibition is enforced. *Judge not, that ye be not judged.* Which is strengthened by an exprefs declaration in ver. 2. *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.* This may be applied to retaliation either from men or from God.

1. We should not be censorious of others, as ever we would not be served *by men* in the same kind. They may be faulty indeed in making such returns; but it can hardly be expected, that when other men see that we make free with their characters, they will not make free with ours: They will even think themselves obliged in their own defence to scan our actions more narrowly than they would otherwise do; and very probably in their turn be as rash and uncharitable upon us, as we have been upon them. Divine Providence wisely and justly so permits it, that men who fish for scandal, are very often met with in their own way; and it seems to give a general satisfaction, when they are effectually exposed.

2. We should avoid censoriousness, as ever we would escape *the judgment of God*: For,

1<sup>st</sup>, Without repentance, we may expect that he will severely animadvert upon *this sin* in particular. Which upon many accounts may be esteemed a very great and heinous sin. It is a direct invasion of God's province: Either anticipating the work of the great day;

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 325

on which account the Apostle exhorts the *Corinthians*, 1 Epist. iv. 5. *Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts* : Pretend not to judge of things out of the cognizance of men now, and that are designed to be so till the great day; as the secrets of the heart; otherwise you will usurp God's place. Or it is judging men for things, wherein they are not at all accountable to us, but to God only; judging his servants in things which concern none but their master and themselves: As in matters which he hath left indifferent, or which neither the good of society, nor the appointment of God require to be called before any human tribunal. *Who art thou that judgest another's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth*, Rom. xiv. 4. *Why dost thou judge, or set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ*, ver. 10. And every one of us shall give account of himself to God, ver. 12. In such matters, as the Apostle is there speaking of, every man is to give account of himself to God, but men have no right to call one another to account: Therefore to judge another in those things, is to thrust our selves into God's province. And will not God, think you, chastise such arrogance? It is also very injurious to our neighbour. Evil surmizes of him weaken our own affection; and if we spread them abroad,



may lessen his reputation with others, and draw many pernicious consequences after them ; for which we shall justly be accountable, as long as they spring from a sinful action of ours, and such effects might be foreseen likely to ensue. And we may add to all the rest ; that it is a practice, wherein we cannot but be self-condemned, if we reflect how we should resent the like treatment in our own case. Every man inveighs at unjust censures, when he feels the lash of them : And may not the judge of all be reasonably expected, if we should so *smite our fellow-servants*, to say, *Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant ?*

2<sup>dly</sup>, We may expect that God will proceed with rigour in judging *our offences against him*, if we are rigid censors of our neighbours. We can have no reason to complain, if God shall treat us according to the measures we observe to others. He will never indeed exceed the measures of justice, however we act ; he will not so retaliate in his proceedings ; but if we allow uncharitableness, we are to expect no mercy, *Jam, ii. 13. He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.* And what then must become of us ? If God be strict to mark all our real iniquities, can we stand ? Can we answer him for one of a thousand of our actions ? The uncharitable are excluded from any hope of the benefit of Gospel-grace. God grant then, that we may have mercy on our selves,

by

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 327

by being more merciful in our censures of others.

I might now in the close of this subject pursue such reflections as these:

That this is one remarkable instance of *godliness having the promise of this life and that which is to come*; that there is in particular an ordinary connection between charitable judging on our part, and mild and gentle censures from others in the world; and that those who throw about censures at random, commonly meet with very cutting returns: And especially that great regard will be had in the future judgment of God to men's present conduct in this matter.

That the neglect of this precept is a melancholy instance, how little true Christianity is practised among those who profess it; when this notorious vice of uncharitable judging prevails so much every where.

But I chuse rather to shut up this discourse with some proper directions for guarding us against a censorious spirit.

Let it be a settled resolution with us, to maintain a good opinion of every man in particular, till we are obliged by evidence to quit it. This is a duty we owe to God and man; and our suspicions, especially our reflections, should never outrun or exceed the discovery men make of themselves.

Often recollect the evils included in censoriousness, and that are used to attend it.

That it arrogates divine perogatives, is a constant act of injustice to our neighbour, and a plain violation of the golden rule of doing to others as we would be done unto. And besides the retaliations to be feared from the resentment of men and the righteous judgment of God for it; there is one thing fit to be often thought of by an ingenious mind: That in the serious review of our spirits and actions, conscience will never reproach us for having admitted too favourable an opinion of any man, but we shall always have reason to blame our selves, when we find that we thought too hardly of him.

We should carefully avoid and mortify the usual incentives to this temper. Idleness and want of good employment often leads people to this vile practice; many set up for judges of others, because they have nothing else to do. Selfishness and pride are common principles of censoriousness; men think too highly of themselves, and are strongly tenacious of their own interests; and imagining other people to stand in the way of their reputation or advantage, they know not how to lessen them but by detraction and uncharitable censures. Violent attachment to a party is very often the parent of this crime. The charity of some, like that of the *Jews* of old, is confined to those of their own way; and so they  
give

SER. XIV. *Charitable judging.* 329

give themselves an unconscionable liberty to expose and blacken other people. This party-zeal has in every age been the foundation of the greatest excesses. Whereas if we would but enlarge the community of love, as our Master has taught us to do, to all mankind; and our brotherly love to all that hold the head; this would extinguish the desire of censure.

We should especially think frequently of the number and greatness of our own faults, and our need of allowances both from God and men. If we are not strangers at home, it is certain we are privy to many more irregularities and defects of our own, than we can be of any other man: If we are not conscious of the same enormous sins as some publicly commit; yet we must be sensible of very many particulars which will not bear a strict scrutiny, but need gracious indulgence from the blessed God daily: Let us judge our selves for these, and we shall be very tender in judging others. We cannot but discern many parts of our own conduct, which are capable of an ill construction by other men, tho' we should be conscious of our own honest intention in them: How should we complain, if our neighbours should take them by the worst handle? Let not us then do so by them; but judge favourably and charitably, *lest we also be tempted.*

Finally,



Finally, think often, how gentle and long-suffering God has been to us already ; and that if he enter into judgment with us, we can have no hope for eternity ; but that *if we judge our selves impartially, and our neighbours charitably, we shall not be judged.*



SERMON



# SERMON XV.



Sincerity.



I COR. V. 8. The later part.

—*But with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*



THE Apostle had in the seventh verse represented *Christ* as *our passover sacrificed for us*. That is; In his becoming a sacrifice for us, he resembled the *pascal lambs*, which were slain by the *Israelites* in *Egypt*. When God was about to accomplish the deliverance of his people

people out of the house of bondage, and *Pharaoh* was unwilling to let them go, God inflicted many judgments upon *Egypt*; and after others, appointed a destroying angel to pass through the land, and to slay all the first-born in every house, from the royal palace down to the meanest family. But he was pleased, in order to make a gracious distinction in the case of the *Israelites* from that of the *Egyptians*, to appoint them to slay a lamb for every house, and to sprinkle the blood of it upon the side-posts and upon the upper door-post of their houses; promising, that upon sight of the blood, the destroying angel should *pass over* and spare their families. Thus, while divine vengeance was hanging over the heads of sinners, God sent his own Son to shed his blood as a sacrifice; in virtue of which those, on whom it is sprinkled, who are intitled to the benefit of it according to the Gospel-constitution, shall be graciously spared and passed over by God.

St. *Paul* having thus represented Christ as our *pascal lamb*, goes on to press the duty of Christians in language alluding to the *Jewish* passover.

The *Jews* kept a festival throughout all their generations, in thankful remembrance of this great and gracious deliverance. So, says he, *let us* Christians *keep the feast*.

And it was a circumstance very particularly enjoined in the celebration of the passover, that they should eat it *with unleavened bread*.

The

The *Hebrew* word, *Matsoth*, which is so rendred, strictly imports as much as *pure and sincere* bread, that is, unmixed with leaven. In allusion to this, the Apostle exhorts Christians to keep the feast with a qualification that answers to that figure. As the *Israelites* were to remove leaven out of their houses before the passover; so we should lay aside *the old leaven*, the *leaven of malice and wickedness*, all sorts of known sin, either in corrupt affection or sinful practice; and keep the feast *with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*. Christ himself warns his Disciples against *hypocrisy*, under the same allusion of leaven, *Luke xii. 1.* He began to say unto his Disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

We may understand the Apostle, by the phrase of *keeping the feast*, to have *the Lord's supper* particularly in his eye; which is to Christians just such a commemorative sign of the sacrifice of Christ, as all the *Jewish* passovers in after-ages were of that in *Egypt*. And so the text would be a direction to us for the frame which is especially necessary in observing that particular festival.

But I apprehend, with the general stream of interpreters, that the Apostle had not his eye so much to that ordinance in particular, as to a christian course in general, correspondent to the *Jewish* passover. As if he had said, "Let your whole lives be like their passover, an exercise of praise and service and obedience  
" to



“ to God, as it becomes those who are re-  
 “ deemed by Christ from so great evils and by  
 “ so great a price; but then see that all be done  
 “ *with the unleavened bread of sincerity and*  
 “ *truth.*

After all that has been said of the *christian temper*, in the general *characters* of it, and in the principal *branches* of which it consists; I would in the last place consider some *qualifications*, which should run through every branch of the christian temper: And this passage is a proper foundation for discoursing on that, with which I chuse to begin, *sincerity*; for it is here recommended as a property requisite in the whole of our christian obedience.

In the prosecution of it, I would shew 1<sup>st</sup>, The nature of *Gospel-sincerity*. And 2<sup>dly</sup>, Our engagements to see, that this be a qualification of all the exercises of the christian temper and life.

I. Let us inquire into the nature of *Gospel-sincerity*.

Two words are used in the text, I apprehend, to signify much the same thing. The former, translated *sincerity*, is as much as to say, *a thing which may be best judged of in clear sun-shine*<sup>a</sup>. A counterfeit will not bear the light; but that which is true, will: Such is

---

<sup>a</sup> Ἐλικρινία, qu. τῇ εἰλῇ κρινόμενῃ. *Constantin. Lex.*

sincerity. Or it may be an allusion to the judgment past upon grain, when it is winnowed; whereby that which is valuable, is separated from the rest. <sup>a</sup> Sincerity will bear sifting, and will appear the better for it. The other word <sup>b</sup> signifies *reality*, in opposition to that which is feigned or a meer appearance. And when sincerity and truth is recommended by the emblem of unleavened bread, or pure and unmixed bread, it denotes *simplicity*; which we find joined with *godly sincerity*, 2 Cor. i. 12. The word translated *simplicity* <sup>c</sup>, signifies *being without folds*, a metaphor that intimates an open and undisguised behaviour. It was the character of *Jacob*, that he was a *plain man*, Gen. xxv. 27. The Greek version imports <sup>d</sup> a man not formed or shaped, that is, to serve a turn. Sincerity is the same thing, which the Scripture so often expresses by *uprightness*; and is opposed to *guile and hypocrisy*, which we are called to lay aside, 1 Pet. ii. 1. The description of the blessed man is given from his sincerity, *Psal. xxxii. 2. In whose spirit there is no guile.* And so is *Nathanael's*, Joh. i. 47. *An Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.*

Now religious sincerity will comprehend in it the following particulars.

---

<sup>a</sup> Παρὰ τὸ κρίνεσθαι ἐν τῷ εἰλεῖν seu εἰλεῖσθαι. Nota in Hesychium, edit. 1668. <sup>b</sup> ἀληθεία, <sup>c</sup> ἀπλότης. <sup>d</sup> ἀέπλας.

1. A single intention and aim to please God and approve our selves to him through our whole course. That it is our principal study to be well-accepted with him, before all other considerations, and above all other motives of acting; and that we resolve to conduct our selves chiefly, and in bar to any thing else, by the hope of his favour and the fear of his displeasure. This is meant by having *the eye single*, Luke xi. 34. To which *a double-minded man* stands opposed, *Jam. i. 8.* who has some desire to please God, but is in suspense between that and other motives of acting; the balance now turns one way, and then another: It is truly said concerning such a man, that he is *unstable in all his ways*. But the basis of sincerity is this, that *whatever we do, we do it unto the Lord, and not to men*, Col. iii. 23. As far as we suffer our selves to be swayed by other considerations more than by a regard to God, and especially when we are carried away by other inducements to run the risque of losing his favour and falling under his displeasure; so far a breach is made upon Gospel-sincerity; whether it be the pleasing of other men, or the advancement of our own worldly interest, that is set up in competition with him, and allowed a preference before him.

We are indeed allowed, not only to aim at our own spiritual and eternal advantage; which is inseparably connected with the pleasing of God; but also at our temporal interest, whenever it will not interfere with our duty; and at

the

SER

the  
prof  
scie  
mai  
of o  
selve  
not  
rity  
him

N  
form  
we d  
this  
there  
with  
rect  
But w  
hath  
ought  
intent  
duty,

2.  
essenti  
it for  
we dil  
proper  
capaci  
we ong  
1. Sin  
ing, o  
rily im  
good a  
cere m

the pleasing of men, when we can have a prospect of reaching that end with a safe conscience. But if either of these is made our main aim, or is pursued at the known hazard of offending God ; if we seek to please our selves or other men at this expence, *we are not the servants of Christ*, Gal. i. 13. Sincerity is wanting, as far as a concern to please him hath not the preeminence.

Not that we can actually be supposed to form this intention in every particular action we do. In many cases it is sufficient, that this design be habitual. In actions, where there is no suspicion of evil, a man may act with full sincerity, though there be not a direct and express regard had to God therein. But wherever there is deliberation, when there hath been a doubt and struggle, whether we ought or not to do a thing ; there an actual intention to please God and to perform our duty, is necessary to sincerity.

2. An impartial inquiry into our duty is an essential part of sincerity. That having fixed it for our aim above all things to please God, we diligently apply our selves to the use of all proper and appointed means, according to our capacities, to discover his mind and will, *how we ought to walk and to please God*, 1 Thess. iv.

1. Sincerity consists not with a rashness of acting, or a negligence in enquiry ; but necessarily implies a hearty desire to *know what is the good and acceptable will of the Lord*. A sincere man is willing to discover his master's will,



tho' it should happen to contradict the sentiments of which he is most firmly persuaded at present, or the practices of which hitherto he hath been most tenacious; and ready to change his mind or his course upon conviction.

He not only cannot satisfy himself to shut his eyes against light, when it is offered him; but diligently applies himself to the means of information. He will consult the dictates of his own mind, and carefully search the word of God, and gladly imbrace any opportunity by which he may be assisted to understand the meaning of it better. He is desirous to be free from prejudice and prepossessions that might give him a wrong bias, and hinder him from the admission of light and proper evidence, from whatever quarter, and by whatever means it is offered him. And therefore as conscious of his own liableness to mistake, and how easy it is to have latent prejudices of which a man may not be particularly sensible at the time, he often applies to God by earnest prayer, that he would be his guide and teacher, and would relieve him by his grace against every sinful bias and wrong impression or influence he may be under. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* is the frequent language of his heart: *What I know not, teach thou me.* He sets himself to *prove all things*, as he hath opportunity; to consider, and make the most impartial judgment that he can upon the means of information. And as sensible of his continuing imperfection, he still *follows on to know*

*know the Lord*, and would ever remain open to light. This of upright inquiry is a great branch of sincerity.

It is observable, that *Nathaniel* had that illustrious character given him by Christ, of being an *Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile*, upon his discovering himself to be an impartial inquirer. He had as yet no actual knowledge of Christ. Upon *Philip's* telling him, *John i. 45. We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth: Nathaniel*, like a man careful not to be deceived in a matter of the greatest Importance, as this was, whether Jesus was the promised Messiah, honestly proposes an objection which started in his mind upon what *Philip* had said; *Can any good thing, says he, come out of Nazareth?* ver. 46. Either the meanness of the place, or the bad character of the inhabitants, might lead him to suspect it. Or he might be prepossessed with the same mistaken sentiment, which some teachers of the law expressed in *John vii 52. that no prophet could come out of Galilee.* Or perhaps he understood *Philip* to mean, that Jesus was born in *Nazareth*; and then, knowing with the rest of the *Jews* from *Micah's* prophecy, that Christ was to be born at *Bethlehem*, till he was set right in this fact, he could not yet get over the objection. *Philip*, without standing to answer him, it may be without being able to do it, because he was yet but a young Disciple,

presses *Nathaniel* to *come and see*? to go along with him and converse with Christ, that he might make a trial himself whether there was not reason to think the same of Christ that *Philip* did. *Nathaniel*, like a truly upright and conscientious man, as he would not take so great a matter upon trust without evidence; so on the other hand he would not neglect an opportunity of better information, when he was so fairly led to it; but goes along with *Philip* to Jesus. And no sooner was he come within hearing, but before any conversation had past, Christ receives him with this encomium; *Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile*. Wherein our Lord eminently fixes this character upon an impartial inquirer after truth. As if he had said, "Thou  
 " hast acted like an honest and sincere man,  
 " both in the objections thou hast started a-  
 " gainst me, and in coming to make a farther  
 " trial. Thou didst without favour or affec-  
 " tion say of me, what thou thoughtest agree-  
 " able to Scripture; and yet upon *Philip's*  
 " invitation art come to inquire whether thou  
 " canst discover any thing more certain. Thou  
 " hast neither shewn a rash credulity, in tak-  
 " ing me for the Messiah without proper evi-  
 " dence; nor an unpersuadable obstinacy, in  
 " refusing to use the means in thy power for  
 " better information. This is worthy of a  
 " sincere man.

3. An intire and universal application to the practice of duty, as far as it is known, without

without stated and allowed reserves and exceptions. Sincerity comprehends *integrity* in it, or making conscience of the whole compass of known duty.

If our governing end be to please God, we shall as carefully pursue that end, where we have only that motive, as where there are other considerations likely to influence, beside the pleasing of God. And really there is no trial of our sincere and impartial regard to God, more clear and decisive than this, to observe how we stand affected to those parts of religion to which God and our own consciences alone are privy. For instance,

We shall be as careful about the exercise of every grace and virtue in the inward frame and temper of the Heart, as in the visible action that should flow from it. A hypocrite is satisfied to *make clean the outside of the cup, and of the platter, tho' within he be full of extortion and excess*, Mat. xxiii. 25. But sincerity will concern it self about the inward disposition; in mortifying *the thought of foolishness*, as well as the fruit of it in the life; and in cultivating a right temper of soul to God and man, as well as a blameless outward behaviour to both. A sincere man will bewail the sins which go no farther than thought, if he is conscious that his heart gave in to them, tho' the conception should by some means or other prove abortive: And both in his devotions to God and his transactions with men, he will be solicitous not only to escape



the censure of men, but that the actions they are ready to commend flow from an inward principle; and that dispositions be not wanting in the heart, correspondent to all the *light shewn before men*.

For the same reason sincerity will engage to equal care in private conduct, as when we are upon the publick Stage. It will not allow a man to be a libertine in secret, as long as he appears in open view a man of probity and virtue; nor to be an Atheist at home, while he wears the mask of a Saint abroad; nor to be in a readiness to practise a base trick, when he can hope for concealment, while he appears accurately just in cases where he knows he is strictly observed. An upright man makes conscience of owning God in his family and his closet, as well as of publick worship; and will be as careful to maintain life and seriousness in the one as in the other. It is probable, that Christ points at something of this nature in *Nathaniel's* case, when he tells him, *Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee*, John i. 48. Possibly he was there in retirement, engaged in holy meditation and devotion; and Christ lets him know, that when he was there alone, out of the reach of any human eye, he saw and observed him. It is plain, that some private transaction of importance passed there, because *Nathaniel* declares himself immediately to be convinced of Christ's extraordinary character, from his being able to give him a  
hint

hint of this; and it is equally plain, that it was some good thing that he had done in private, because Christ, instead of reproving him for it, produces this as an additional evidence, that he had not spoke at random in pronouncing him an *Israelite indeed*. The reason, why a sincere man is the same in private as in publick, is in truth because he never thinks himself alone, but always in the presence of God, as well as of his own conscience; and that consideration has principal weight with him.

And sincerity disposes to pay an *indiscriminate* regard to God's authority; or an equal respect to it in all cases, where we can discover it: That it be allowed to command and sway the whole man; so that we are willing to receive any thing for truth upon his testimony; and any thing for law upon the signification of his will; and to consecrate all that we have and are to his service without reserve. It is a false and dissembled respect to God, if we consent not to be at his direction universally and without exception; if we *count not all his precepts concerning all things to be right, and hate not every false way*, Psal. cxix. 128. I say not, that any man performs actually perfect, unfinning obedience; but that it is inconsistent with Gospel sincerity, to have a fixed and known exception against any particular branch of duty, or in stated favour of any irregular habit

or inclination, which we are convinced to be such.

4. A correspondence and harmony between inward sentiments and the words and actions, is necessary to constitute sincerity.

This must be maintained in the affairs of religion, if we would approve our selves to be sincere. It will forbid us to profess or act any thing, in matters of belief or worship, different from the inward persuasion of our minds. The charge, which the Apostle *Paul* lays upon *Peter*, is observable to this purpose, *Gal. ii. 11, — 14. When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with the dissimulation. But I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the Gospel.* The case was this; *Peter* was persuaded, that it was a truth of the Gospel, that there was no difference to be made between those who embraced Christianity, whether they received circumcision or not: He was one of the first of the *Jewish* converts, whom God took care in the most solemn manner to convince of this truth in the case of *Cornelius*, *Acts x.* He had acted for a  
time

time agreeable to this sentiment, conversing freely with the converted *Gentiles*, without any regard to the ceremonial distinction of meats: But when some converted *Jews*, who were tenacious of the Law of *Moses*, came down where he was; lest he should offend those bigots, he withdrew from the *Gentile* converts, as if they were unfit for the free society of Christians of the circumcision: And this had such an influence, as to carry other *Jewish* converts, even *Barnabas* himself, to the same dividing practice. This *St. Paul* calls *dissimulation, not walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel*; and declares, that *Peter was to be blamed* for it. And without doubt it was an intrenching upon Christian sincerity; seeming to profess, contrary to his inward persuasion, that ceremonial distinctions were yet in force, when he knew that they were abolished. The Gospel, we see, will not countenance an action that in fair construction is repugnant to our principles; much less will it allow us to make a contrary profession.

And the same honest agreement between our words and hearts should run thro' our behaviour to men. As far as we are conducted by sincerity, we shall not pretend to friendship, where really we have none; nor make promises of kindness, where none is intended; nor act an unfriendly part behind men's backs, after professions of regard and respect to their faces. Especially, we shall not make pretence of



of friendship, on purpose to have the greater advantage for imposing on men; or use crafty insinuations to draw things from them in the freedom of discourse, on design of divulging those very things afterwards to their disadvantage. Sincerity requires fair and open dealing in all our concerns with them. But this last hath been the subject of a particular discourse already \*.

II. I am to shew, of what importance it is that this qualification should attend us in all the exercises of the christian temper and duty.

1. It is expressly required by divine precept in the several branches of our duty. The new man in general, which Christianity teaches us to put on, is *after God created in true holiness*, Eph. iv. 24. The first and great commandment, of *godliness*, is thus prescribed, Mat. xxii. 37. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*, Josh. xxiv. 14. *Fear the Lord, and serve him, in sincerity and truth*. And the Gospel eminently inculcates the same thing. *The hour cometh, and now is*, says Christ of the evangelical dispensation, which was then beginning to dawn, *when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to*

---

\* See Vol. 2. Sermon. XIII.

worship him. *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth*, John iv. 23, 24. And this is the first thing pressed upon Christians in their approaches to God, *Heb. x. 22. Let us draw near with a true heart.* The love to Christ, upon which we can hope for divine grace with us, must be in sincerity, *Eph. vi. 24.* And the same qualification is insisted on in our love to our neighbour, 1 *John iii. 18. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* Thus, he that giveth in acts of charity, is required to do it *with simplicity*, with integrity and unfeigned affection, *Rom. xii. 8.* and ver. 9. *Let love be without dissimulation.* The same temper should be carried into every relation, and attend the performance of all our relative duties; as it is particularly mentioned in the case of servants, *Eph. vi. 5. Servants, be obedient, — in singleness of heart, as unto Christ.*

2. It is indispensably necessary to our acceptance with God. How can that be expected to meet with a favourable regard from God, which was not in intention done to him? Nor can any persuasion or practice, how agreeable soever it may be in it self to the rule, be a *faith that gives Glory to God*, or *the obedience of faith*, which is not the fruit of honest and impartial inquiry into the mind of God: Indeed it is not the homage of a reasonable creature, or of a Christian; but a  
rash

rash and bold adventure, that shews little of a conscientious concern whether we be right or wrong, and might have happened the one way as well as the other. Partial obedience cannot be founded upon an upright regard to God's authority, *Jam. ii. 10. Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, that is, live in the stated disregard of one known command, is guilty of all;* that is, of contemning the authority upon which all is built. The Apostle adds the reason, ver. 11. *For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit not adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.* The same holds good in any other precept. And to expect the acceptance of any outward regards, while the heart is wanting, is an argument of high contempt of God, as if either he had not knowledge to discover, or holiness to detest vile hypocrisy. Whereas that is so much abhorred by God, that *the portion of Hypocrites* expresses the severest punishment, *Mat. xxiv. 51.* Such only have their sins pardoned now, *in whose spirit there is no guile, Psal. xxxii. 2.* And they only will have them all *blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord:* And therefore the Apostle prays for the *Philippians, that they might be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, Phil. i. 10.* Gospel sincerity will appear to be of the greatest consequence in the judgment-day.

3. This

3. This qualification alone can minister solid satisfaction to our selves upon reflection. If men could always discern hypocrisy, they would detest it: But this may be out of the cognizance of creatures. One man may possibly reach his ends with another by a disguise; but how low and empty a satisfaction will that produce, if he cannot *be satisfied from himself*? So the truly good man alone is, *Prov. xiv. 14.* Consciousness of his own sincerity will be a perpetual feast to him. *Our rejoicing is this, says St. Paul, the testimony of our Conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the World, 2 Cor. i. 12.* If our consciences can bear us this testimony, it will be a spring of joy within our selves, that depends not upon other people's estimation: *We shall have rejoicing in our selves alone, and not in another, Gal. vi. 4.* It will be a peace, that no man can take away; and which will give comfort and confidence toward God. *We shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God, 1 John iii. 19,—21.* We may then entertain a just assurance of his favour and acceptance, and have the greatest freedom and hope in all our applications to him; as it follows, *ver. 22. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his*  
† com-



*commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.* Happy they are now, in every condition, who can appeal to God and conscience for their integrity; while the hypocrite must ever be either afraid or ashamed of himself.

4. Sincerity will be the easiest method of conduct. What art and pains are needful to wear a disguise tolerably? It is uneasy to a man, while he wears it; and odds, but that upon some opportunity he throws it off, and shews himself in his proper colours. When the heart is one way, and the behaviour another, under some present unnatural influence, the restraint must be unpleasant, and maintained with difficulty: And therefore the best way to secure in all weathers the *appearance* of piety, and purity, and charity, and of every virtue, is to make sure of a hearty disposition to be what we would seem to be.

5. Herein we shall copy after the most illustrious and excellent examples. By this the saints inrolled in the records of Scripture, where the Spirit of God hath imbalmed their Names, *obtained a good report*. This was the glory of *Noah* and *Job*, that they were *upright* men; and of the excellent of the earth, in their several generations, who have finished their course well, and whose *end was peace*, Psal. xxxvii. 37.

But above all, the Lord Jesus shone in this character. He was most sincere in persuing the pleasing of God as his governing aim; so  
that

that he could say, *I do always those things that please him*, John viii. 29. He executed every thing which was given him in charge, without exception or reserve; fulfilling all righteousness; performing every thing which was the duty of the human Nature as such; submitting to all the ceremonial observances, which were of divine appointment and remained in force during the *Jewish* œconomy; and compleatly executing all that was incumbent on him by virtue of the peculiar law of the Mediator. So impartial and universal was his obedience, that he could solemnly appeal to his Father at the close, *John* xvii. 4. *I have finished the work, which thou gavest me to do.* And as he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, 1 Pet. ii. 22. This is observed concerning him, where the Apostle particularly represents him, as going before us, *shewing us an example*, ver. 21.

Insincerity on the other hand is most directly the image of the Devil, that false and lying spirit, who from his craft and deceitfulness is called the *old serpent*, and represented as assuming all shapes and disguises to carry on his designs; sometimes *transforming himself into an Angel of light*, full of cunning and subtilty, of wiles and stratagems. This view, which the Scripture gives of the spirits of darkness, should strongly possess our souls with the deformity and vileness of an insincere temper and behaviour.

The subject we have been upon may very fitly be *applied* various ways.

1. As a subject of sorrow, for the evident violations of sincerity among those who wear the name of Christians. Indeed we cannot without arrogance pretend to fix the charge of hypocrisy upon any man, as long as he maintains a fair and regular appearance: Every man, especially every Christian, should be very careful, that he assume not the province of God, the searcher of hearts, by arraigning or suspecting other men's sincerity, when they seem religious in the judgment of charity. But without entering into the secret things which belong to God, too many flagrant instances of insincerity may be observed and lamented every day. How often is a pretence of religion evidently made to serve the design of defrauding men? what tricking arts are practised under the masque of friendship? Such things as these, which often come to open light, may justly be the grief of serious Christians, who know the value of sincerity in it self, and how contrary every breach of it is to the obligations of Christianity.

2. As a measure of judging our selves, whether we are in a state of acceptance with God. Here we may and ought to enter into the closest scrutiny of sincerity. We are privy to what passes within our selves, tho' we cannot reach the secrets of others hearts. Conscience is *the candle of the*  
*Lord*

*Lord* within us, to enable us to discern the real state of our own case. Let us therefore bring our selves within the light and judgment of our own consciences, upon this most important inquiry, whether we are sincere, or not? Whether the pleasing of God is our ordinary and prevailing design and aim? Whether we are impartial in our searches, what the mind and will of God is? Whether universal obedience to all the known will of God is our stated aim, and resolution, and endeavour? Whether there be an agreement between our hearts, and our words and actions? Another man cannot decide these questions for us, upon which our acceptance with God depends: But God knows how the matter stands, and we may discern it, and it is of the utmost importance that we pass a right judgment our selves.

3. As a ground of humiliation to the best for the defects in their sincerity, as well as in every particular branch of goodness. Sincerity, as prescribed by the rule, is to be considered as perfect; as well as the particular graces and virtues, of which it is a qualification: That is, every failure in any of the articles, wherein sincerity consists, is as contrary to sincerity, and as truly a breach of our duty; as every degree of doubting is contrary to faith, or any violation of truth to veracity. And tho' the grace of the Gospel admits of *prevailing* sincerity as

A a

the



the term of life, as well as of the prevalence of other graces and virtues ; yet a Christian has reason to humble himself before God for the defects of his sincerity, as well as of every other fruit of the spirit. Tho' we can entertain hope that we have been *prevailingly sincere*, yet who shall dare to say upon recollection, that he hath been *perfectly sincere* ? That his intention and design to please God has been so intire, that he hath never deviated from it ? That he has inquired into the mind of God with as much diligence and impartiality, as he might and ought to have done ? That his obedience has been as unreserved and universal as it might have been ? That he hath never been guilty of the least dissimulation or false disguise ? Now, tho' we may have good reason to hope for divine acceptance according to the grace of the Gospel, upon the consciousness of sincerity in a prevailing degree ; yet we should confess and bewail every known defect in it in our temper or conduct either to God or man.

4. As an engagement to cultivate and advance in this excellent qualification.

How greatly would this blessed end be promoted, if we would think at every turn of the eye of the great God upon us ? That we are wholly naked and open to him, with whom we have to do ? If we would frequently place our selves by faith  
and

and serious meditation at the judgment-seat of Christ; when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed? If we consider, how high sincerity stands in divine estimation, how valuable it is to all men as far as they can discern it, and what satisfaction it will produce in our breasts?

Let us then studiously mind and practise it as the principal thing in all the seeming good we do; either in the acts of piety to God, or of justice and charity to men.

Particularly, whenever we keep the Gospel-feast of the holy supper, let not this qualification be wanting. It is the great thing requisite in every communicant; *the wedding-garment*, without which we cannot be welcome guests. And it should attend every part of our Work at that solemnity. We should be sincere in the reasons and ends of observing it, that it be done in pure obedience to our Master's will, and in hope of that spiritual benefit for which it was appointed. In the exercise of those dispositions, which should attend the remembrance of a dying Saviour; such as thankfulness for the love of God in the work of our redemption; sorrow for sin, which should be excited by this evidence of its evil nature, and faith in the promises of God which are ratified in Christ's blood. In our desire of the blessings offered us in virtue of his blood. In our resolutions of new obedience: And in our charity and affection to our fellow-Christians.

We have there the highest instance of undissembled love set in view, faithful promises sealed on God's part. We are immediately transacting with him, who can judge of sincerity; and without it, instead of receiving advantage by that holy institution, shall eat and drink judgment to our selves.



SERMON



## SERMON XVI.

Constancy and perseverance.

I C O R. XV. 58. former part.

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye  
stedfast, unmoveable, always abound-  
ing in the work of the Lord.*



EXT to *sincerity*, and indeed as  
very closely connected with it,  
*fixedness* or *steadiness* may pro-  
perly be considered as a *general*  
qualification, which ought to run  
through every branch of the christian temper.



The Apostle in this chapter explains and proves at large the doctrine of the resurrection: A most comfortable and encouraging doctrine to every sincere Christian, under the present difficulties which attend his pilgrimage; and in the prospect of death approaching, whether in the usual course of nature, or to be undergone for the testimony of Jesus. Upon this refreshing revelation the Apostle grafts the exhortation in the text. From the promised rewards he excites Christians to attend to their present work. Seeing they have reason to look for a glorious and happy resurrection from the Lord Jesus, they should mind *the work of the Lord* now: By which we are to understand the whole work and duty, which our master prescribes us by the way.

There are *two* qualifications of our christian obedience, which are here recommended: The one is *steadiness*, and the other *abounding* in this work. For the last, that we should do our utmost, and make the highest advances we can therein, there will be occasion to consider it under another qualification yet to be discoursed of; namely, *christian zeal*.

That, which is to be our present subject, is *steadfastness*, and *unmoveableness in the work of the Lord*. Two words near akin in their signification are used to express one and the same thing with the greater emphasis: The former \*

---

\* Ἐδρασίῳ ab ἰδρα, sella, quod ab ἕζομαι, sedeo.

is an allusion to a *man seated*, sat down in a settled posture, in opposition to a man that is moving about and unfixed: The other word \* directly expresses what was imported by that metaphor, *unmoveable*. This same Apostle writing to the *Colossians*, chap. i. 23. expresses steadiness in the faith by both words, with the addition of a third. † *If ye continue in the faith, grounded, or fixed upon a solid foundation, and settled or steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.*

I am to prosecute this truth,

*That steadfastness in the graces and duties required of us, is a necessary qualification of the christian temper.*

Where I shall 1<sup>st</sup>, Explain this qualification. And 2<sup>dly</sup>, Shew the necessity of it.

I. For explaining the qualification, it may be observed, that it includes two things in it. 1<sup>st</sup>, That the exercise of grace and duty be habitual and constant, in opposition to that which is merely occasional or by fits and starts. 2<sup>dly</sup>, That it be persisted in to the end of life, in opposition to apostacy.

1. The christian temper and course must be *habitual and constant*, in opposition to that which is merely occasional, or by fits and starts. It is not enough, that now and then we attend

\* Ἀμετακίνητοι.

† Εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε ἐν πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἰσχυροὶ, καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τῆς εὐαγγελίας.

to religion ; but the ordinary bent of our spirits must run this way, and customary practice correspond with it. We should *live* soberly, righteously and godly ; that is, it should be the stated and even course of our lives, what we are fixedly designing and pursuing.

Indeed such a constancy in our christian obedience, as is absolutely perfect, and denotes an intire freedom from sin, is not what the Gospel insists upon. Experience and Scripture too, shew this to be impossible and impracticable in the present life. *There is no man that sinneth not*, 1 Kings viii. 46. *There is not a just man upon earth, that doth good and sinneth not*, Eccl. vii. 20. *How should a man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand*, Job ix. 2, 3. *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?* Prov. xx. 9. No man can ; and therefore the Psalmist makes that acknowledgment and prayer, *Psal. xix. 12. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.* The new Testament plainly affirms the same thing of Christians, *Jam. iii. 2. In many things we all offend.* 1 *Joh. i. 8. If we say, we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us.* St. Paul pretended not to have already attained, or to be already perfect, *Phil. iii. 12.* And therefore the Disciples of Christ are directed in the Lord's prayer daily to acknowledge and ask the pardon  
of

of *their trespasses*, as well as to beg God to give them their daily bread.

Such passages as these plainly shew, that a perfect evenness and uniformity of obedience, without any mixture of sin, is not to be supposed in any man living. If any are so vain as to make the pretence, they have more reason to say with *Job*, chap. ix. 20. *If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me; if I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse*: "My very saying so against notorious evidence of fact, will be a proof that either "I am a very faulty stranger at home, or a "proud and arrogant boaster." If a man could not be an acceptable Christian without such a perfect uniformity of conduct, there would be no such Christian to be found in our world.

But yet such an evenness and constancy in our devotedness to God and goodness is attainable, as in the gracious acceptance of the Gospel is so stiled; and is a very different and distinguishable thing from the character of many, who play fast and loose with God; from that character, for instance, which is given of the *Israelites* in *Psal.* lxxviii. 8. *as a generation that set not their hearts aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God*: And in ver 37. *whose heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant*. A *right spirit* is the reverse of this, *stedfast with God and in his covenant*. That is,

1<sup>st</sup>, Our



1<sup>st</sup>, Our *design and purpose* should be for a constant adherence to God and our duty *at all times*. Those resolutions for God are insincere, which are made with a designed exception against some known precepts, or in favour of some known sin: And those are equally insincere, though they should be ever so extensive as to the branches of duty, which are made only for some particular times and seasons, and not for all. As suppose, I will mind my soul and the service of God upon Lord's days, but I will be my own master and at full liberty on other days: Or, now in a serious hour, when temptation is at a distance, I will set my self to repent of my sins and to walk softly; but if, when temptation returns, when my companions renew their importunity, I should begin a new score, I hope I shall repent again, and God will forgive me. Such purposes, formed with a view and a sort of design of turning again to folly, are an abomination to God, and shew that the first step is not taken in real religion. There may be purposes of constancy, and yet a fatal miscarriage; but if even these be wanting, that man's religion is vain. He cannot be stiled truly upright in the lowest sense, even in intention, who is not come so far as to *purpose not to transgress*; who makes it not his fixed design to be faithful to God and to maintain a good conscience, at one time as well as at another, for the future as well as at present; and especially to be upon his guard in a known

hour

hour of temptation, and when he may be most apprehensive of danger.

2<sup>dly</sup>, Religion must be actually made our *stated and ordinary business*, to denominate us with any propriety constant in it. We must set about it as our work and main concern, and not only mind it on the by. This is imported in that expression of the Apostle, *Acts xxiv. 16. Herein do I exercise my self, to keep a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.* “ I reckon this my chief  
“ business, and accordingly make it my daily  
“ care and employment to endeavour to know  
“ and do my duty to God and men. I have  
“ no concern upon my hands, that I esteem  
“ equal to this.” Though the thoughts are not employed at all times with equal intenseness and application to the direct consideration of our duty, as it is impossible they should be; yet these thoughts are commonly uppermost in the mind of a man truly religious, they often recur to it; he minds them, as we say, ever and anon: Actual attention to his main concern is not long intermitted.

3<sup>dly</sup>, *Deliberate and presumptuous sins* must be carefully *avoided*; or a breach will be made upon our constancy and steadfastness in the work of the Lord, in the mild and favourable sense of the Gospel. Sins of ignorance and common infirmity break not in upon christian constancy: Though they are sins, yet they are not properly breaches of covenant. If we set out in our christian course with a  
just

just consideration of the state of human nature, we did not absolutely resolve against these; though we resolved not to countenance them, and to endeavour more and more to outgrow them under divine culture and grace: And as long as we retain that temper with reference to our ordinary infirmities, they should not be thought breaches of covenant. The *Psalmist* before his great fall, though he was aware of many imperfections, could say, *Psalm* xviii. 21, 22. *I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me.* But known and presumptuous sins are of quite another nature, such as are directly voluntary and chosen, against the dictates of a man's own judgment and conscience: These are direct insults upon God's authority. Every particular act of this kind is contrary to covenant-engagements, and so far a renouncing of God for our Lord and Sovereign. If a good man fall into such offences, it is impossible for him to be assured, that he is born of God, as long as he continues under the power of them. And in the number of such presumptuous sins we must reckon——

*All great and notorious sins* in their nature; such as either any man may discern to be amiss by the light of nature, or that a man competently acquainted with the holy Scriptures may plainly perceive to be forbidden there. If a man fall into any of these crimes,

crimes, tho' upon a sudden temptation, and without discernable thought and reflection; yet they cannot be called sins of meer surprize and infirmity, because they are so contrary to the light and habitual frame of a good man, that they could not be done without some reluctancy.

And *any sin*, tho' of the *least* kind, when it is *committed upon actual deliberation*, and against the actual judgment of the mind, is a wilful sin, which breaks in upon evangelical stedfastness. If there be time and space, between the temptation and the ill action, to consider the evil nature of it; if our heart rebukes us at the time, admonishing us that God forbids what we are about to do, and yet we presume to do it; if there be debate and arguing, and yet temptation carries the day; this is a breach of covenant, tho' in ever so minute an instance. It makes us *the servants of sin*; for *to whom we yield our selves servants to obey, his servants we are to whom we so obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness*, Rom. vi. 16. And if a servant of God so yields himself to any wilful sin, it would be a sin unto death, if he was not renewed again to repentance.

And much more heinous still will it be, if the instance of offence, into which a man falls, be at once greatly criminal in it self, such as conscience is habitually furnished against, and also which it actually remonstrated against at the time. This is a prodigious breach upon



upon the temper and character of a saint. As in the case of *David's* dreadful fall into the complicated sins of adultery and murder; or that of *Peter*, when he denied his Master thrice with oaths and curses, and that after a solemn warning which he had received but a few hours before of his danger. Such sins make a dreadful wast upon conscience, and such an interruption in a holy course, as would be ruinous without particular repentance, and really makes their recovery difficult. Hence *David* found occasion to pray for God's creating power to purify and renew him, as if he was to begin the divine life anew, *Psal.* 51. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.* And *Peter's* recovery is described as another conversion, *Luke* xxii. 32. *When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* Tho' such instances of recovery may prevent utter despair in others upon their falls; yet the falls themselves are so marked in Scripture, as much more strongly to admonish us against the like.

4<sup>thly</sup>, Upon any known falls, there should be a *speedy and proportionable repentance*. Next to a constant evenness in our walk without turning again presumptuously to folly, a quick return to God and to our selves by unfeigned and answerable repentance, is the best that can be done; that the interruption may be as small as possible. Indeed *David's* case is a sad instance of the hardning quality of such offences even in good men, that he seems

seemsto have continued many months under the power of his sin : It is a mighty instance of grace, that he was recovered after all. But certainly, where there is a latent principle of goodness under such sins, it is not usual to *suffer them to lye long upon them.* Upon the return of such exercises, as a pious man has accustomed himself to, self-examination and prayer, hearing or reading the word of God, surely he will bethink himself, and then not be easy till he break off his sin by repentance and *come to himself.* His return will be with eminent bitterness and deep sorrow. He will not be for covering or extenuating his sin with excuses, or for avoiding just shame for it ; but will condemn himself more severely than others can do, and give glory to God by confession and reparation to his power, as publick as his offence was. Like *Peter*, when roused out of his lethargy, *he went out and wept bitterly.* He will do all that lies in him, to repair the dishonour done to God, or the damage to his neighbour ; will walk softly and humbly all his days, lie as a deep penitent at the foot of divine mercy ; endeavour to regain the ground he has lost, and to repair the breaches made in the healthful state of his soul ; and double his guard and care for time to come.

The issue of a fall with a good man, should be like that described by the Apostle in the case of the *Corinthians*, 2 Cor. vii. 11. *This self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort,*

*sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, that you might not offend again? Yea, what clearing of your selves? Not by self-justification or excuses; but by endeavours to clear your selves from guilt, by application to God for his pardoning mercy; and from the sin it self, by putting evil far away. Yea, what indignation, at the sin, and at your selves for having been guilty of it? Yea, what vehement desire, that you might by no means fail of pardon and purification? Yea, what zeal for the honour of God in time to come, out of a sense of the dishonour which you had cast on him and his ways? Yea, what revenge, upon your sins, by careful endeavours to mortify the deeds of the body? Those, who after eminent falls have nothing of this temper, will have just ground to fear the insincerity of all their former pretensions.*

2. The christian temper and course must be *persisted in to the end of life.* This is to be stedfast and unmoveable in it. It is not enough, that there hath appeared some evenness and constancy hitherto; but we must be careful that we hold out to the end. Many have begun and continued for a while to behave in a very promising manner, but *their latter end has been worse than their beginning*, and they have proved apostates after all. But we are concerned, as it is said *the righteous shall do, to hold on our way*, Job xvii. 9. and *having begun to build, that we may be able to finish.*

That we be not wearied out by the length of our way. We are to *lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees*, Heb. xii. 12. Not allowing our selves to be *weary of well-doing*; either by reason of the frequent repetition of self-denying duties; or through the decaies of age and strength, and the increase of bodily infirmities, which are apt to make the exercises of religion tiresome. We should be careful to maintain a *willing spirit*, even when *the flesh is weak*. Thus it is promised, Isa. xl. 31. *That they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.*

That we suffer not our selves to give over our work in despondency, because of the slow progress and small success we discern: As if it was an impracticable thing to arrive at the perfection we hope for, because we still find opposition from depraved appetites, and affections, and passions. We should go on notwithstanding in our conflict, as assured of victory if we faint not.

That we are not affrighted from our steadfastness by the approach of sufferings; but resolutely adhere to God and a good conscience, *withstanding in an evil day*, that *having done all we may stand*: Remembring the terms on which Christ invited us to become his Disciples, that we must be content to *deny our selves, to take up our cross*, any cross which he lays in our way, and to *follow him*,



him, whithersoever he leads us; and that *whoever will save his life by turning his back on Christ, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for his sake, shall find it*, Mar. xvi. 24, 25.

That we suffer not our selves to be drawn aside from the faith or practice of the Gospel, by giving heed to them that lie in wait to deceive; but *beware, lest being led away by the error of the wicked, we fall from our own steadfastness*, 2 Pet. iii. 17. To this purpose it concerns us to see, that our persuasions are well-grounded in the word of God, and not taken up upon trust; and then that no other consideration, beside evidence of a mistake, draw us off from the truth as it is in Jesus, or the practice of any known duty.

And finally, that we be not insensibly drawn on to apostacy, by the importunate allurements of present temptations. Many, who behaved well for a time, and some that have acquitted themselves with bravery in a time of persecution; yet by remitting their care and watchfulness, have had the edge of holy affections and resolutions so worn off by degrees, through the deceitfulness of riches, the cares of life, and the customary society of irreligious men, that they have *left their first love, the things that remain are ready to die*, if they prove not absolute apostates. It claims the lively and daily concern of all who would finish well, to guard against this danger.

II. I am to shew the *necessity* of this qualification, of *stedfastness*, in the whole christian temper and work.

I. It is necessary to our acceptance with God, and our final happiness, by divine constitution.

Constancy or evenness in our course of obedience, so as not to turn aside knowingly to crooked paths, is many ways signified to be a necessary term of our acceptance. It is a natural fruit of sincerity or uprightness; and therefore as that is insisted upon, so must this fruit of it be. The *Psalmist* desires to be kept free from presumptuous sins; because then, says he, shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression, *Psal.* xix. 13. Customary sinning is often declared to be inconsistent with a new nature, or being born of God. So the Apostle *John*, 1 *Joh.* iii. 6. *Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not*, as a matter of allowed and ordinary practice; *whosoever sinneth in such a manner, hath not seen him, neither known him.* No, he belongs to another master and father; for, *ver.* 8. *He that committeth sin, is of the devil.* *Ver.* 9. *Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.* And so our blessed Lord himself, *Joh.* viii. 34. *Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin.* The meaning of these passages can be no less than this; that a truly good man can-

not allow himself ordinarily to commit a known sin, and least of all to continue *wallowing in the mire*, if he should fall into it. Without an habitual abstinence from known sins, we can have no title to the benefit of Christ's sacrifice. Under the law no sacrifice was allowed for presumptuous offences; but *he, who did ought presumptuously*, was understood to *reproach the Lord, and was to be cut off from among his people*, Num. xv. 30. The reason is given, *ver. 31. Because he had despised the word of the Lord, and had broken his commandments*. Under the Gospel indeed the virtue of Christ's sacrifice reaches to presumptuous sins, as well as others: *The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin*, 1 Joh. i. 7. But from none without repentance, or till men come to *walk in the light, and not in darkness*, ver. 6.

Perseverance is equally necessary to our final reward. So the promises run. *He that endureth to the end, shall be saved*, Mat. x. 22. *To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life*, Rom. ii. 7: *Be thou faithful unto the death, and I will give thee a crown of life*, Rev. ii. 10. *Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing*, Luk. xii. 43. On the other hand, apostacy is declared to cut off all just hope, and to fix men under the most dreadful doom, *Ezek. xviii. 24. When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and commit-*  
*teth*

*teth iniquity, and doth according to all the abominations which the wicked man doth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done, shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die, Heb. x. 26, 27. If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, that is, by apostacy, and without repentance, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins: But a certain fearful looking for judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. If we draw back, it is unto perdition, ver. 39. 2 Pet. ii. 20. 21. If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again intangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. Awful warnings! which should ever keep up a wakeful care to finish our course with joy.*

2. *Stedfastness is necessary to the credit of our holy profession. Nothing is so great a disparagement to religion, and so freely opens the mouths of its enemies, as any scandalous falls, or especially the open apostacy of those who have made a distinguishing pretence to it. The body of mankind, how injuriously soever, will interpret that to be a defect in re-*



ligion it self, which is really nothing else but the great imperfection or insincerity of those who have pretended to it: And therefore every good man should be solicitous, that *his good may not be evil spoken of* through his default, *Rom. xiv. 16. Wo to the world because of offences. — But wo to that man by whom the offence cometh, Mat. xviii. 7.*

3. It is necessary in conformity to our Lord Jesus Christ: That we may prevailingly bear his resemblance, though we cannot in this world do it perfectly. The Apostle *John* argues from God's perfect and absolute purity and holiness, that prevailing purity is necessary in all that share in his friendship; that *if we say, we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth, 1 Joh. i. 5, 6.* So all that the holy Jesus will own for his, must be really conformed to him in the steadfastness of obedience which he performed in our nature, though they cannot come up to his perfect and absolute measure. His course of obedience was exactly uniform, regular, and even without any variation; he always actually exercised a devotedness to God. The same temper must be habitual in us, or there will be no similitude of character. And as he was *obedient unto death, Phil. ii. 8. and finished, as well as began, the work which God gave him to do, Joh. xvii 4.* so we must in our measure follow him to the end of our course below, being *faithful unto death.*

By

By way of reflection.

1. We have here a rule for trying the goodness of our state, as far as we are advanced in life, by inquiring into the evangelical constancy of the christian temper and course, since we have given up our names to be the Lord's: Whether it has been the daily settled bent of our souls to please God, and avoid every known sin? Too many seem allowedly to divide their time between God and sin: From transgressing they fly to repentance; and then, as if past accounts were cancelled by that means, they return again with ease from repenting to known transgressions: Thus they do in a circle, and think they have done enough. They are always overcome, when a suitable temptation offers, and always sorry when it is over, but as ready as ever to relapse when a new temptation comes. *Their goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it passes away.* This is not vital religion, nor these *the spots of God's children.* Their purpose is never allowedly to offend; their ordinary course is an even walk with God; they rarely fall foully and presumptuously; but if they do, they repent in earnest, and very seldom relapse. Yet

2. The best have room to censure themselves for the lesser unevennesses of their frames and course. Though they should not be such as are direct breaches of covenant, yet they are sinful and evil; and the Gospel-way

to prevent these from making an inroad upon the habitual state of our souls and our peace with God, is by disallowing them, exercising a general repentance for them, endeavouring to gain ground of them, and soliciting for the daily pardon of them through the blood and intercession of Christ.

3. We have all reason to be excited to the greatest concern and care, that we may always be stedfast and unmoveable in the work of the Lord.

We have many warnings of our danger, by Scripture and experience, both of intermissions to which we are subject, and of greater falls, and even of apostacy it self: Enough to awaken our constant fear and care.

Every breach made in our christian course, lessens the pleasure of it, unavoidably increases our difficulties, and is in it self a tendency to apostacy. Which should therefore set us on our guard against the least defection from God.

The stedfastness of God to his covenant with us, and the uniform course of his past goodness to us, are arguments to our gratitude not to be unstedfast with him. *He is with us, while we are with him*; his covenant is *ordered in all things and sure*, and *his promises yea and amen*; he never breaks with us, till we are grossly perfidious. And we have found him hitherto nigh at hand to us, in all that we have called upon him for. Upon any revolt therefore, he may justly expostulate with us.

us, *What iniquity have ye found in me, that ye are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity?* Jer. ii. 5.

The best we have to expect, if we turn aside to folly, is, his fatherly corrections. There is not a kinder declaration in the book of God, than that in *Psal. lxxxix. 30,—33.* *If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; —Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.* The design of such corrections is gracious, to reclaim them; but why should we make our father's rod necessary?

That we may therefore be steadfast and unmoveable, I would offer the following *directions* for a close.

See that you begin well upon the foundation of a sincere and unreserved devotedness to God; that you have *the power*, as well as *the form of godliness*. A flaw in the foundation will make the building totter; and unless it be rectified, may occasion our perishing under the ruins of it; like *the house*, which our Saviour speaks of, that was *built upon the sand*.

Often review the state of your souls; let not long accounts remain without inspection: But often examine, that ground you have gained or lost, what disorders may be soon rectified, before they have proceeded far, or before



fore your hearts are *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Improve every melancholy instance of the falls of others, to awaken your own caution. When you see other people's miscarriages, the best improvement you can make of them is that to which the Apostle directs upon such an occasion; *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall,* 1 Cor. x. 12.

Be steadfast in the faith, as ever you would be steady in your obedience. That is the principle, which feeds and animates christian obedience. Every doctrine of divine truth has a practical influence; and its influence will be proportionable to the strength of our persuasion about it. If your faith be shaken, that which depends upon it, and would not be a reasonable service without it, will be shaken too.

Aim at advances, if you would not decline. If once you think you are come to your full pitch, it will soon make you remiss, and lay you open to the snares of life. Therefore St. Peter unites the exhortations; *Beware, lest you fall from your steadfastness: But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ,* 1 Pet. iii. 17, 18.

Eye the most excellent examples to excite your emulation. Make those your chosen patterns, who walk most closely with God; and even them no farther than they do so.

Trust not your own hearts, but *in him who is able to keep you from falling.* And there-

fore often and earnestly pray to him to keep you back from presumptuous sins, Ps. xix. 13. to make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you, 1 Pet. v. 10. to keep you by his mighty power, through faith unto salvation, ch. i. 5.

And often think of the promised reward as sure, and great, and near. *Knowing the time, Christians, reckon it high time to awake out of sleep; for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed.*



SERMON



## SERMON XVII.



### A tender Spirit.



2 CHRON. XXXIV. 27. the former part.

*Because thine heart was tender.—*



**T**HIS is God's own commendation of King *Josiah*. He entered upon his reign very young, at *eight years old*; and though he was the son of an exceeding wicked father, yet was a prince of eminent religion through the several periods of his government. Personal religion appeared in him sometimes.

betimes. *In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, or when he was but sixteen years old, he began to seek after the God of David his father; that is, he publicly avowed the worship of the true God, which had been notoriously cast off in the days of his own father Amon, ver. 3. And in the twelfth year of his reign, the twentieth of his age, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, &c.* He began a publick reformation of the worship of God, from the abuses which had been countenanced in the days of his predecessor; several of which the sacred historian goes on to enumerate. *And in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was twenty six years old, he proceeded to repair the house of God, ver. 8, &c. In the course of the repairs, Hilkiab the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses, ver. 14.*

Whether this was that original book of the law which *Moses* laid up by the ark, or some ancient authentick copy of it, is not so certain. Probably this had been concealed in some secret place of the temple, to secure it from the impious fury of some of the idolatrous kings of *Judah*; and now happily come to light, when people were set to work to repair it. It is plain by what follows, that both king and people were in a great measure strangers to the contents of it till this discovery. Probably the reading of the law had been neglected both publickly and privately in the reigns of several



wicked kings who had gone before *Josiah*; it may be most of the copies had been wilfully destroyed, or, by the general neglect of transcribing more, were grown very rare and scarce. Without doubt the king had not written a copy of the law with his own hand, according to the command in *Deut. xvii. 18.* Which surely he would have done before this time in obedience to the law, if he had been particularly acquainted with it; since he is declared to have *done that which is right in the sight of the Lord* from his early days, *ver. 2. i. e.* according to such degrees of light about the mind of God as he had, before the law was found; either by hints received from some good people about him; or by means of some imperfect *abstracts* of the law, which might go about, while *intire copies* were wanting.

The law being found, it was carried to the king; who, like a man earnestly desirous to *know the way of God more perfectly*, ordered it to be read to him; and like a man of a tender conscience, *when he heard the words of the law, rent his clothes*, *ver. 18, 19.* fell under it, struck with the dreadful threatnings contained in it against transgressors; and apprehending from them, that *great wrath from the Lord* was like to be *poured out upon them*, sends a deputation of some of his principal ministers to *inquire of God* in the case by *Huldah the prophetess*, *ver. 20, 21.* to inquire, whether there were any hopes that God's an-

ger

ger might be appeased, and what was necessary to this end. *Huldah* by direction from God lets him know, that God was peremptorily resolved to execute his vengeance upon the *Jews* for their great and long revolts from him : But for the king himself, he should have the favour to *be gathered to his grave in peace, that his eyes might not see all the evil that was coming upon them.* The reason of this mark of distinction in *Josiah's* case is given in the text. *Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thy self before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, &c. I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord.*

I have chosen this divine encomium upon an old testament saint, to represent to you one eminent ingredient or qualification of the christian temper, which should attend us with reference to every part and branch of it ; *a tender heart.*

The same thing is expressed by *an heart of flesh* in opposition to *a stony heart*, in some promises of the old Testament, which were to receive their principal accomplishment in evangelical times in the spiritual seed of *Abraham* ; in *Ezek. xi. 19.* and *chap. xxxvi. 26.* *I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* I apprehend *St. Paul* had those promises in his eye, when he says to the *Corinthian* converts, *2 Cor. iii. 3.* *Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministred by us, written,*  
not

*not with ink, but by the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.* These converts were a sort of epistle from Christ, in commendation of the sincerity and efficacy of the Apostles ministry among them: This commendatory epistle of Christ was written in the *fleshly tables of their heart*; that is, in their hearts made soft, and ready to attend to and obey the Gospel by the operation of the Holy Spirit, agreeable to the antient promise, that he would *give an heart of flesh.*

To this stands opposed what we so often read of, *hardness of heart, an heart of stone.* We read of some, who *made their hearts as an adamant stone*, Zech. vii. 12. the extraordinary hardness of which makes it exceeding difficult to carve or fashion it by art into a regular figure. Others are said to *make their faces harder than a rock*, Jer. v. 3. which you cannot easily move or penetrate. The same bad disposition is elsewhere set out by a metaphor taken from flesh, but such a part of flesh as has contracted a brawny stiffness and hardness, by much exercise and hard labour. Under such an allusion the *Gentile world* is described as *past feeling*, Eph. iv. 19. And others as *having their consciences seared with an hot iron*, 1 Tim. iv. 2. The *tender heart* in the text stands opposed to all this.

My business upon this head shall be, 1<sup>st</sup>, To give a general account of the import of a *tender heart.* 2<sup>dly</sup>, To describe more particularly

larly the ways, wherein such a temper should express it self. And 3<sup>dly</sup>, To shew, what foundation is laid for it by Christianity.

I. It may be proper to give a general account of the import of a *tender heart*. Two things seem to be pointed at by it.

1. *A quick and ready Sense and feeling* in spiritual things. A tender heart is one, that hath *senses exercised* and *prompt to discern both good and evil*, Heb. v. 12. Spiritual things are apt to make a deep impression, or spiritual pains and pleasures are easily felt, where this is a man's character.

*Quickness of apprehension* in matters of a religious nature is one instance. Light in the mind is necessary to guide all our powers and actions. *If our eye be evil, the whole body must be full of darkness: If therefore the light that is in thee, in the understanding, which is as the eye of the mind, be darkness, how great is that darkness?* Mat. vi. 23. If our minds are blind to the true light, or under the influence of a false light, this must be followed with disorder in all our actions. But how many are insensible of the light which shines around them, and of those things, of which one would think they might have the fullest conviction? *Their understandings are darkened, thro' the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness, or hardness of their hearts*, Eph. iv. 18. *God speaketh to them once, yea twice; but they perceive it not*, Job xxxiii. 14. They



discern not plain duty, tho' it glares in their eye with full evidence. They know not the plague of their own heart, tho' it is so obvious to reflection. How happy is it on the other hand, to be ready to take in the light which is offered? to be quick at discovering our duty and danger, and wants and distempers, our best friends and our worst enemies, the way in which we ought to go, and the temptations in our way? Things of such importance to our spiritual and eternal welfare?

*Ready reflections of conscience* are also included. When conscience is silent, so as not to animadvert upon sin and check men for it, or not to set their duty in view, and excite them to it; or, when it favours some known sin, or connives at the omission of some plain duty: When this power of the soul is not in a disposition to act, or not to act impartially; it bespeaks a hard and insensible mind. Either the *mind and conscience is defiled*, Tit. i. 15. that is, the practical judgment is vitiated, so as to call evil good, and good evil: Or else it is *seared as with an hot iron*, 1 Tim. iv. 2. so as to be altogether unapt for sensation. But a tender heart imports, that conscience is quick and active, ready to answer its character of being *the candle of the Lord within us* to search us out, and to be a faithful monitor, *accusing or excusing* as there is reason given for either.

A dis-

A disposition to be *easily and suitably affected* with our own spiritual concerns, enters into the notion of a tender heart. A hard heart is unmoved by such things as are fittest to impress it. Of how many is it the character, that the knowledge they have dies as they receive it, and kindles no answerable affections? *Seeing many things, they observe them not; opening the ears, yet they hear not*, Isa. xlii. 20. The meaning of the prophet is, those people were as little affected with the works or word of God, as if they had not seen or heard them. Or if affections are moved for a time, they are but transient, they presently wear off: This is the description of *the stony ground*, Mat. xiii. 20, 21. So many deal with their convictions, like the man described by St. James, chap. i. 24. *He beholdeth himself, as in a glass, and goeth away, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was*. Such is the remorse of many sinners under divine punishments, like the people of Israel in *Psal. lxxviii. 34, — 37. When God slew them, then they sought him; and they returned, and enquired early after God. — Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues: For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant*. A tender heart, on the contrary, is readily affected according to the nature and importance of things represented to it: And these affections produce lasting fruit. The

impressions are strong, and the influence is lively.

2. A *pliable disposition* to yield to divine influences and engage in the practice of our duty, is the other branch of a tender heart. Tho' we should have ever so great a sense of sin and duty; yet if our hearts are unyielding, and will not return unto the Lord, this is hardness of heart in the sense of Scripture. However we may have been awakened by God's Spirit striving with us, by the reflections of conscience, by ordinances or providences; yet if all this leaves us as it found us, if we forsake not the sins of which we are admonished, nor engage in the duties of which we are convinced, our hearts are still in God's account as the adamant. Indeed the greater our light is, if we *hold the truth in unrighteousness*, our obstinacy is the more aggravated: As Stephen charges the Jews, Acts vii. 21. *Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost*; counteract his design and motions. *Hardness and an impenitent heart* are much the same thing, Rom. ii. 5. But a tender heart chearfully complies with the will of God: It cannot be described more fully in a few words than in these, that it is *willing and obedient*, Isa. i. 19.

II. I proceed to give a more particular description of the principal ways, wherein this holy tenderness of spirit should express itself in our course. And a representation of this

this may be given in reference to several points.

1. In relation to *the word of God*, or the discoveries he has made of his mind. I begin with this, as it was the particular instance referred to in the case of *Josiah*.

A man of a religious tenderness of spirit will make it his business to acquaint himself with the mind of God. Others may be content to act blindfold, or to take their religion upon trust, to *receive for doctrines the commandments of men*; because they chiefly consult their own ease, or that which may be acceptable to other people. But a good man has in the first place determined to *shew himself approved to God*, and therefore is concerned to be well assured of his mind. He may not be so soft and pliable as others, to the dictates and determinations of men; for their mind is not the thing he is inquiring after; but what his Lord and Master reveals for truth, or prescribes as duty. This he is earnestly solicitous to know, and therefore diligently studies his bible, as the notification which God hath given of his mind. *I meditate in thy precepts*, says *David*, *and have respect unto thy ways*, Psal. cxix. 15. He endeavours to make his best use of the assistances within his reach, which may any way help him to understand the Scriptures; especially of the ministry of the Gospel: But then he does not believe the sense of Scripture, given by a minister, or by any number of ministers, to



be the sense of Christ, meerly because they say it is; but like the noble *Bereans*, he *searches the Scriptures diligently*, to discover whether their sense agree with his rule, *Acts xvii. 11.* and readily receives what he finds to have a foundation there, but no more. It is a noble obstinacy to men's authority, and at the same time bespeaks the greatest *obsequiousness* to Christ, to admit no more for his mind upon the dictate of men, than we can *our selves* discern to be so, upon an impartial comparison of what they say with that in his word upon which they found it. But on the other hand, a tender spirit is willing to learn from any man, and will be thankful for any assistance to discover the meaning of the Scriptures in any particular of truth or duty.

Such a man pays a ready and reverential subjection to the authority of God in his word, as far as he understands it: Whether it be in less or greater concerns, in matters of belief or of practice. *My heart, says David, stands in awe of thy word, Psal. cxix. 161.* Such a man chearfully sacrifices any favourite opinion or inclination, as soon as he apprehends that the word of God declares against it. It is included in a man's becoming a Christian, that he makes this determination in the general, that *every thought shall be captivated to the obedience of Christ. 2 Cor. x. 5.* Not that he hath no thoughts, no sentiments, no inclinations, which are different from the mind of Christ: every mistake in judgment,

judgment, every irregular desire certainly is so. But as he comes gradually to discern the inconsistency between the mind of Christ and any sentiment or practice of his own, he puts his general determination in practice in that particular case: That wrong thought is captivated to the obedience of Christ. The language of his heart concerning the whole law of God, is the same with the language of *Israel* upon the delivery of the *Mosaical* law, *Exod. xxiv. 7. Moses took the Book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: And they said, All that the Lord hath said, will we do, and be obedient.* And as particulars come to his notice, he yields an obedient ear to them.

He is afraid to do any thing, which he *doubts* to be disagreeable to the word of God. There is indeed a conscience unduly scrupulous, which is a great obstruction to the usefulness and comfort of some infirm Christians: And it is the duty and interest of all to come, as far as may be, to a clear and determinate judgment about the particulars of their conduct; by considering, as any doubt occurs, what foundation there is for it in the word of God; and by consulting the wise and judicious upon the case; for it is past doubt, that we should not make more sins and duties to our selves than God hath made so. But some, by the weakness of their judgment, or the power of melancholy, cannot get clear of their doubts, as to some things,

which others esteem lawful : And in some parts of conduct in lesser matters, possibly the most judicious can discern no more than probability concerning the mind of God on either side. Now while a scruple remains, tho' it should in it self be ill grounded, it is a just discovery of a tender spirit to forbear an action which appears doubtful. The Apostle clearly decides this case, in the affair of meats forbidden by the law of *Moses*. The *Jewish* converts, by means of the remaining prejudices of their education, thought it unlawful to eat these : The Gentile converts were persuaded of their christian liberty, and they were on the right side of the question : But while this mistaken apprehension remained in the *Jewish* converts, it would have been sinful in them to do as the Gentiles did, *Rom. xiv. 23. He that doubteth, is damned, self-condemned, if he eat, because he eateth not of faith.* Where sin is suspected on one hand, and there is no room for a suspicion on the other, a tender spirit will avoid the doubtful part.

He is readily impressed, suitable to the several parts of truth proposed to him out of the word of God. Our affections, under the proper direction and conduct of light, are of the greatest service to facilitate holy obedience. And it is a good indication of a tender spirit to have suitable affections readily excited, according to the particular branches of truth and duty set before us. It is the general character

rafter of a man sincerely good, that he *trembles at God's word*, Isa. lxvi. 2, 5. He receives it with reverential awe, and becoming affection. Thus *Noah, being warned of God* of the approaching deluge, was *moved with fear*, Heb. xi. 7. This was the expression of *Josiah's* tender heart in this chapter, ver. 19. *When he heard the words of the law, he rent his cloaths.* So, when the riches of grace are set before us, to have love, and gratitude, and trust in God, excited thereby to a proper exercise, is highly becoming a soul softened and ingenuously melted by the comfortable discoveries of the Gospel.

And such a man frequently compares his heart and life with God's word : as one suspicious that he may have offended, and yet truly desirous not to offend, or to make his peace and to come back to God and himself, as soon as may be, if he hath offended. *I communed*, says the Psalmist, *with my own heart, and made diligent search*, Psal. lxxvii. 6. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies*, Psal. cxix. 59.

2. In relation to *sin* a tender spirit eminently appears.

Conviction is more easily admitted, where this is the frame of the heart. *Solomon* tells us, *Prov. xvii. 10.* that *a reproof enters more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool.* When conscience is awake, it is ready to give attention to a hint, and to make personal application. In *two* sad instances, which  
we



we have upon record, how far even good men may be *hardned through the deceitfulness of sin*, that is, *Peter's* denial of his Master, and *David's* scandalous fall and continuance in it for so long a time; yet we have in *both* an instance also of the easy admission of conviction by a man habitually good. A look from the Lord Jesus darted the most pungent conviction into the mind of *Peter*, so that *he went out and wept bitterly*, Luk. xxii. 61, 62. And a word from the prophet *Nathan* bowed *David's* heart, and brought him to confess his sin, 2 *Sam.* xii. 13. And in another case, the numbring of the people, *his heart smote him* without a monitor, 2 *Sam.* xxiv. 10. A tender heart is jealous of more sin in himself than he particularly knows; and therefore the language of his heart is often the same with *David's*, *Psal.* xix. 12. *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.* It would therefore be strange, if he should be unready to fall under conviction, when his sin is set in order before him; if then he should endeavour to cover and excuse it.

Upon conviction, shame and sorrow readily flow in a tender mind. The hardned sinner is *not ashamed, when he committeth abominations*, Jer. vi. 15. possibly he may glory in his shame, Phil. iii. 19. But softning grace strikes a man with deep remorse upon the remembrance of his offences; it produces a *broken and a contrite heart.* *Psal.* li. 17. He

*is ashamed and blushes to lift up his face to God because of his iniquities, Ezr. ix. 6. Like the publican, who stood afar off, and could hardly presume to lift up so much as his eyes to heaven; he smites upon his breast, full of contrition and godly sorrow, Luke xviii 13. His soul is filled with pungent concern, and overspread with a holy confusion; he is more free to condemn himself than others can be: And that not meerly because he may be liable to human punishment or censure; but much more for his offence against God; and even in cases, where men might rather commend than condemn him. The great impression made on his mind falls in with the confession of the prodigal; Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. His sorrow is more animated by ingenuity, than by fear. Sin is so odious and burthensom to him, that he mourns even for the offences of others; and much more for his own.*

He is affected with known sin of every kind. The omissions of duty, as well as direct commissions of sin. The very remains of sin dwelling in him, tho' he has hopes that no sin has the dominion, are no small uneasiness to him; which often occasion such a complaint as that, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

He is very solicitous to be delivered from the guilt and the stain of the sins, of which  
he

he is convinced. A soft heart cannot be easy under the sense of sin, till he can have hope of a pardon ; till *his feet are washed*, when they have contracted new defilement. *David* come to himself, expresses the greatest importunity ; *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me*, Psal. li. 2, 3. A true penitent upon conviction, in any instance of transgression, will sue for mercy, plead the atonement, and earnestly pray for the sanctifying spirit. *Create in me a clean heart, O God*, after my new impurities ; *and renew a right spirit within me*, ver. 10. Even suspicion of guilt will carry him to the mercy-seat to supplicate mercy.

And the matter will not rest in relentings, but issue in the most essential part of repentance, ceasing to do evil and learning to do well. *Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation never to be repented of*, 2 Cor. vii. 10.

And as a tender spirit will naturally discover it self in the proper exercises of genuine repentance for sin admitted ; so it will produce a cautious and habitual fear of sin thro' a man's course. He dares not indulge himself in a thing which he apprehends displeasing to God, tho' it should be ever so common, or pass among men for a trifle. *He abstains from the very appearance of evil*, 1 Thess. v. 22. as afraid to tread upon doubtful ground. He *watches and prays, that he may not enter upon*

*temptation; is afraid of insnaring company, and of such actions as he finds to be generally dangerous to himself, though they may be lawful and safe to others. He is careful, that he make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, and keeps his heart with all diligence.*

These are the proper expressions of a tender spirit with reference to sin.

3. In relation to the *events of providence*, and the circumstances of his own lot and condition. And in this matter,

When he is under the most favourable providences, he is afraid of abusing divine mercies: *Lest his table should become a snare, or he should be full and deny God: Lest he should grow secure, and forgetful of his dependance on God; or his spirit become vain and worldly; or he should put the evil day far from him, or give into any criminal indulgence of his appetites, or be lifted up with pride.*

He entertains an awful fear at the apprehension of God's judgments. That was *David's* frame, *Psal. cxix. 120. My flesh trembleth for fear of God, and I am afraid of his judgments.* *Noah* was moved with fear of them, when they were at a distance: And much more will a man of a tender mind be so, when *God's hand* is visibly stretched out, or when there are many moral prognostics, that *God is making a way to his anger.* The least tokens of God's displeasure affect him, such as others hardly observe; and while hardened sinners



sinners are unmoved under the greatest. *Jer. v. 3. Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return.*

He is desirous to understand the voice of God in his providences; that God would *shew him, wherefore he contendeth with him*, Job x. 2. And he endeavours, that his own temper and behaviour may comport with the providences he is under; whether they are prosperous or afflictive. He would *know both how to be abased, and how to abound*, Phil. iv. 12. The particular prospect of calamities approaching, excites him to *prepare suitably to meet his God*, Am. iv. 12. And his chief attention from time to time is to the duty of his present condition.

4. This temper, where it is genuine, will express it self illustriously in relation to *the honour of God*.

Such a man will do what he can himself to promote it. It is the general scope of his actions, to *do all to the glory of God*, 1 Cor. x. 31. All that he has and is, is sincerely consecrated to this aim. And according to his station he will be active and zealous in any designs, that are on foot in his day, conducing to the glory of God and the service of religion. He guards against every thing in his own conduct, which may occasion the name of God to be blasphemed. He is willing to hazard his own honour

honour or interest or life it self, if God may but be glorified ; and can be content to have his own reputation laid in the dust, if his Master may be magnified by it. As *John* the baptist *rejoiced greatly because of the bridegroom's voice* ; though he foresaw that Christ's entrance upon his ministry would eclipse the honour of his own. *He must increase, but I must decrease,* Joh. iii. 29, 30.

In any sin he commits, while insensible sinners are chiefly concerned for the dishonour done to themselves, when their sin is found out ; a man of a tender conscience chiefly laments the dishonour done to God by it. God by *Nathan* set *David's* sin before him in this view, 2*Sam.* xii. 14. *By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme* : And when *David* comes to make his acknowledgment, he principally reflects on the same thing, *Psal.* li. 4. *Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

He greatly rejoices in any thing that tends to the honour of God. If he hears of the advancement of his interest, where he hath no immediate concern in the matter : If good be done any where, though he has no hand in it : And in any service done by others, though he may seem to be lessened by it himself : As *Paul* rejoiced that *Christ* was preached, tho' some did it out of envy to him, *Phil.* i. 18.

And

And on the other hand, he is deeply affected with other men's dishonouring God. *Rivers of tears run down his eyes, because men keep not God's law*, Psal. cxix. 136. He mourns for abominations done in the land, which he cannot help, *Ezek. ix. 4.* As *Hezekiah* deeply resented the blasphemies of *Rabshakeh*, Isa. xxxvii. 1, 2, 3. And he is ready to bear his testimony against the sins of others in all proper ways.

This is some draught of a tender spirit in its proper features.

It remains to be shewn,

III. What foundation is eminently laid for such a temper by Christianity.

You see good men in the antient Church were not strangers to it: Much less should we be under the Gospel: For, the rule of our faith and practice is more compleat. Things of importance to us are no longer wrapped up in figures; but *he, who was in the bosom of the Father, hath revealed him* and his will. *God hath spoken to us in these last days by his Son*; as his fullest and finishing revelation: And therefore, *if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven*, Heb. xii. 25. If we are less moved and impressed by the brighter light which Christ hath brought down from heaven.

The

The recompences of the life to come are more fully revealed to us. Indeed the Church under the old Testament was not altogether unacquainted with these; but temporal promises and threatnings were most inculcated in that dispensation, and the future recompences more darkly and sparingly. On the contrary, the eternal wrath of God against impenitent sinners, and the heavenly happiness reserved for saints, are the motives which the Gospel chiefly dwells upon. And surely the greater importance of the motives, that are now principally set in our view, should make the deeper impression.

The richer discoveries of grace made in the Gospel, is a strong argument to ingenuity for promoting such a temper in us. *The grace of God, that hath appeared to all men,* should soften our hearts to the most ingenuous regard to our Master's will in every thing; *his goodness should lead us to the most kindly repentance.* God's tender concern for our interests, so as not to spare his own Son, but to give him up for us all, should inspire us in return with the most tender concern for his glory. He that continues hard and insensible to the gracious persuasions of the Gospel, surely has no part left in him tender.

The ceremonial observances, which took up so much of the attention of serious minds while they were in force, are now superseded; and therefore the more tender spirit is justly expected with reference to the more substantial parts of religion that remain.

D d

Especially



Especially if we add, that the softning Spirit is more fully promised and more plentifully communicated to the Church now. He must have been often resisted, and his motions greatly quenched, by any who continue hard and obstinate under the Gospel.

Some *inferences* shall conclude this discourse.

1. We may discern the difference between this truly christian temper, and some things which people are apt to mistake for it.

It must not be confounded with a natural easiness of temper. This is not founded upon a regard to God, nor expresses it self with distinction in a religious conduct; but upon all occasions, with reason or without. This indeed is a weakness, and not a virtue; it lays a man open to temptation from all quarters, and makes him liable to every impression; to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, and drawn aside by any sollicitation of a tempter.

It is also a different thing from a mere occasional tenderness under the word or providences of God. *Ahab humbled himself* upon God's threatnings, and *went softly* for a little time, 1 *Kings* xxi. 27. *Pharaoh* himself did the like upon the execution of some of God's judgments in *Egypt*. But these were very different from the tender heart of *Josiah*. Their humiliation was not an habitual temper, and the fruits of it were very short-lived: *Josiah's* was lasting, and brought fruit to perfection. Their

Their tenderness only shewed it self either in some good words upon a sudden conviction, or in forbearing some particular sin for the present: *Josiah* was led by the impression to set about an universal reformation, and to carry it to the greatest extent he could.

2. Let us all seek after and cultivate a religious tenderness of spirit. It is of indispensable necessity to our acceptance with God. What force should that declaration have, to awaken an earnest concern to be possessed of this frame, which God makes in *Isa. lxvi. 2.* *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word?* It is a strong encouragement to our desires, and prayers, and endeavours, that such a promise stand upon record; *I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* If you are convinced of the necessity of this temper, take encouragement from such a declaration to pray to God for his quickning grace, and to hope that it shall not be denied in your attendance upon his appointed means.

And if your hearts are in any measure softened, labour to preserve their tenderness through your course. Be afraid of the beginnings of hardness of heart. Exhort and admonish your selves daily, *lest you should be hardened thro' the deceitfulness of sin,* Heb. iii. 13. Observe and fall in with every good motion of the Spirit of God. Endeavour to maintain an habitual tenderness by the frequent exercises of such

a spirit; especially by daily serious reviews of your own frames and actions, and the speedy exercises of godly sorrow and true repentance, for every thing you discern amiss from time to time in your temper or behaviour to God, your selves, or your neighbour.

3. If you are conscious of such a spirit prevailing in you, take the comfort of it as a good evidence that you are in the christian state. As we have frequent occasion for repentance with reference to every branch of the christian temper; so thanks be to God, there is room for repentance. *A ~~blest~~ and contrite spirit God will not despise*, Psal. li. 17. *Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted*, Matth. v. 4. *God will have mercy on such, and abundantly pardon*, Isa. lv. 7. *He is faithful and just to forgive them their sins*, 1 Joh. i. 9. Though the occasions for penitential sorrow will not intirely cease, while you are in the body; yet when the hardned sinner's mourning time begins, yours will end; at the end of your trial *God will wipe away all tears from your eyes for ever*, and give you the rewards promised to them that overcome.



SERMON



## SERMON XVIII.

### Christian Zeal.

REV. III. 19. the middle of the  
verse.

— *Be zealous.*



**Z**EAL is not a particular grace or virtue by it self, but rather a qualification which should attend us in the exercise of every grace, and in the performance of every duty.

Indeed it is no virtue at all, unless it be well-placed and regulated. Zeal in its general notion is nothing else but a strong and ardent concern for or against a thing, and a



lively and vigorous manner of acting thereupon. It has the denomination of a *religious* zeal, only as far as the objects, about which it is conversant, are of a religious nature. And even a religious zeal is no farther good and commendable, than when it is really on the side of truth and goodness, when it is measured by the importance of things, and when it is expressed and exercised by lawful and regular methods.

It is fit to be observed, that we read in Scripture of a *bad* zeal more frequently of the two, than of a *good* one; and many admonitions are given against some sort of zeal; as I shall have occasion to take notice presently. Which should make us sensible, how highly necessary it is, that a strict caution and a very careful regulation should attend our zeal.

And yet right zeal is a duty, and a needful ingredient of the christian temper, and is recommended as such in the text. Christ from heaven calls his Disciples to it, in an address particularly directed to one of the *seven* Churches of *Asia*, that of *Laodicea*.

The description, which he, who *knew their works* and character, gave of them just before, made this call peculiarly apposite and suitable to them. He charges them in ver. 15. that *they were neither cold nor hot*. They had taken upon them the profession of Christianity, owned the truths and laws of Christ and their obligation from them, and so were not ab-

solutely

solutely *cold*: But on the other hand, there was no spirit in their religion, no vital influence from it; their principles were not lively and active; they did not behave as people in earnest in what they professed, who resolved to make it the business of their lives to observe the christian rule, and to be governed by christian motives, or who were determined upon an adherence to their profession whatever it should cost them. This is the charge against them.

Christ therefore declares his disapprobation of such a *lukewarm* temper. *I would thou wast cold or hot.* As if he had said, "You would act more consistently with your selves, and it would be more for my honour, if either you would intirely quit your christian profession, or else would be more in earnest in the pursuit of it."

In the next verse he expresses his displeasure in stronger terms, ver. 16. *So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.* "As lukewarm water turns the Stomach, so, says Christ, lukewarm and indifferent professors of my religion make me sick of them, I cannot bear them; but unless they repent, I will reject and cast them off from me."

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> verses Christ intimates wherein their lukewarmness lay, or at least points to the natural fruit of it. They *thought themselves rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing*, while their case

was quite otherwise. They reckoned their profession, their privileges, their possession of sound doctrine, or their having escaped common pollutions to be enough, without the real power of godliness. Christ admonishes them how much they were mistaken in their opinion of themselves; after all, they *were wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* And therefore he graciously counsels them to look out for a supply of their wants, and to apply to him for that purpose, who was yet able and willing to relieve them.

And in the verse, where the text lies, he lets them know, that even so severe an admonition was the fruit of kindness and goodwill. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*

“ I have said this, not as pronouncing your condition desperate, but faithfully to warn you of your danger, that this negligence in religion may not be your ruin. *Be zealous therefore and repent.* “ Since this is really your condition, and I have warned you, out of pure grace, of the dreadful consequence of such a temper persisted in ; *therefore repent*, that you have trifled so much hitherto, and *be zealous* for time to come.

*Zeal is a qualification necessary in Christ's Disciples.*

Upon which argument, I would 1<sup>st</sup> explain the disposition, to which we are exhorted. And 2<sup>dly</sup>, Shew the obligations, which lye upon Christ's Disciples to such a temper.

I. It

I. It is very necessary, that the disposition should be explained, to which we are here exhorted. We are required to *be zealous*: But in other places we are warned against zeal, and the word is often used in an ill sense, and the most wicked and pernicious fruits are represented as proceeding from it. It is therefore of the greatest importance, that we should carefully attend to Scripture-light for the due stating of this matter; where we should be zealous, and where not; and what regulations our fervour should be under, for the degrees and measures of it, the principal seat of it, the persons that may be concerned in it, and the proper ways of expressing it. The following particulars may help to discover our duty in this matter.

1. It should be our first care to be well assured, *that the cause is good*, for which our zeal is imployed. That is, that what we are zealous for, is really truth or duty; and that what we are zealous against, is certainly false or evil. *It is good to be always zealously affected in a good thing*, Gal. iv. 18. But the greater our fervor is in a wrong way, so much the more hurt we are like to do to our selves and others. Indeed heat without light, or rash and blind zeal, is the most extravagant and mischievous thing in the world. And therefore careful examination should always go before the actings of zeal. Otherwise we may be found fighting against God, when we think to do him good service; and active instruments



struments in the devil's service thro' ignorance, while we flatter our selves that we are animated by a zeal for God. Such was the zeal so often taken notice of in the *Jews* at the beginning of Christianity. They had a mighty regard for their ceremonial law, and for their ritual traditions: And because the Gospel insisted not on the observance of these, but directed them for acceptance with God to faith in Christ without the works of the law, they set themselves against it with the greatest warmth and eagerness. And this their bigotry and fury is called their *Zeal*. So the original word is, where our translators have rendred it by *indignation* or *envy*. So *Acts* v. 17, 18. *The high-priest and his companions were filled with zeal, and laid their hands on the Apostles, and put them in the common prison.* And chap. xiii. 45. *When the Jews saw the multitudes, that came to hear Paul preach, they were filled with zeal, and spake against those things that were spoken by Paul.* And when the same Apostle endeavoured to convince the *Jews* at *Thessalonica*, that Jesus was the Messiah, *Acts* xvii. 5. *The Jews which believed not, moved with zeal, took unto them certain lewd fellows, and made an uproar.* Here was fiery hot zeal; and the Apostle assures us, that it was a zeal of God, or for God, *Rom.* x. 2. *I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God; but then it was not according to knowledge.* They had not examined the evidences of Christianity, and

so

so blindly and madly opposed it. St. Paul could the better bear this testimony of his countrymen, because it had lately been his own case. He had been *exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers*, Gal. i. 14. And *touching zeal, persecuting the Church*, Phil. iii. 6. But when he came to himself, this misplaced zeal was so far from giving him any comfort, that it was his grief and his shame: He calls himself for it *a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious*, and even *the chief of sinners*, 1 Tim. i. 13, 15.

To be zealous for we know not what, is as bad as to *worship we know not what*. And however positive and confident we may be, after all our warmth, we may be on the wrong side, if our assurance be not the result of a sincere and impartial inquiry. And indeed, if we should happen to be in the right, yet a blind and random zeal, even for truth it self, cannot be acceptable to God; because it is rather by chance, than upon reasonable evidence, that our zeal is on the right side.

Every man therefore is bound, before he gives a loose to his zeal, to use the best helps in his power for discovering the mind of God: And no man should suffer his zeal to outrun his knowledge, or to exceed the evidence he has of the truth or falshood, of the good or evil of things.

2. Zeal should bear a proportion to the *value and importance of things*. Indeed the least truth, of which we are convinced, must not  
be

be given up, nor should we act contrary to known duty in the least instance, upon any worldly consideration. But all truths or duties are not of equal moment or concern either to our selves or others, to the honour of God or the interest of religion. While a warm zeal therefore is not only allowable, but commendable, in reference to matters of importance; yet there is room for the exercise of moderation as a virtue in relation to things of small consequence.

This difference in the value or importance of things should be measured, either by the plain declarations of God in his word concerning the necessity of some points of belief or practice to salvation; or by their obvious tendency to promote or hinder practical godliness, by their plain influence upon the welfare of mankind either in this or the next world.

Now really it is no good sign of sincerity, much less of a regular zeal, to be very warm and earnest about little matters, while there is a plain coldness about things of the greatest moment: To be all on fire about rituals and ceremonies, either for them or against them; when we are negligent and indifferent about the very vitals of religion: To lay a mighty stress upon doubtful things, or the mere dictates of men; and yet to make a small account of the undoubted precepts of God, and even the plain dictates both of natural and revealed religion: To be exceeding eager upon

such



such points, as are confessed by all thinking men to be attended with great obscurity and difficulties, upon knotty and perplexing questions; but slightly to pass over the clear and obvious truths and duties of religion. This is an untoward and a monstrous zeal. Nothing indeed, which appears to bear the stamp of divine authority, is to be received by us with an absolute indifference: But as God has laid a different stress upon things, so should we, and endeavour to follow his declared judgment of their importance, as near as we can. We shall do well in this case to lay to heart Christ's reproof to the Scribes and Pharisees, in *Matth. xxiii. 23, 24.* *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.*

3. Zeal is first to be considered in the temper of the soul, and then in the proper expressions of it in the tenor of the practice. It stands in the first place opposed to indifference or lukewarmness in the heart and affections. So it is eminently to be understood in the text, as appears from the context. But if there be inward life and vigor, this ought to be and will be expressed by correspondent effects in practice: And so zeal stands opposed to slothfulness,



*fulness, Rom. xii. 11. Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.* It is the reverse of *doing the work of the Lord negligently*, of every thing in the outward course that might discover a coldness in affection to God, or in resolution for him, or in hatred of sin, or in our regards to God's honour and interest.

Now though one man cannot judge of another's zeal, more than of any other inward disposition, by any measure beside visible and becoming fruits; yet the fervour of the soul is principally to be considered with respect to divine acceptance. No seeming warmth of zeal for God in pious discourse, no appearance of vigorous acting for him, will pass with God for any thing better than hypocrisy, if all be not animated with the inward fire of holy zeal. It is not enough *with the mouth to shew much love to God*, if *the heart goeth after covetousness*, or something else more than God. *Ezek. xxxiii. 31.* To be forward and ready in religious conversation, to lament the sins of the times and the decay of piety, is a becoming instance of christian zeal; and charity without good evidence to the contrary will induce us to believe concerning another, that *out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh*: But if he who knows all things should know it to be otherwise, he will abhor the vile dissimulation. To be diligent in attendance upon the institutions of divine worship; to be active in endeavours to propagate God's truths

truths

truths and interest, and to prevent the progress of sin and error, are natural fruits of religious zeal: But if we should only design thereby to approve our selves to men; if the language of our hearts should be like *Jehu's, Come, see my zeal for the Lord,* 2 Kings x. 16. this is vain ostentation, and not holy zeal.

4. The *first and principal province* of christian zeal is in relation to our selves: And to other people only in the second place, as we have only a secondary concern in them.

I am afraid by this observation I meet with a very common mistake among people that speak much in commendation of zeal; I doubt they consider it, as if it chiefly related to the conduct of other people rather than to their own. But in truth, though the province of zeal extends farther than our selves, yet not only its first, but its main business is at home. Zeal, as well as charity, is to begin here; in keeping up the fervour of our own spirits in religion, and the intenseness of our own personal obedience.

It should principally operate in ardent desires and endeavours after the increase of light and useful knowledge in our own minds; in *following on to know the Lord, increasing in the knowledge of God* and his will; that we may know our duty better, in order to the direction of our practice; and be more fully instructed in the truths of the Gospel, that our persuasion  
of

of them may be firmer, and their influence more strong and forcible upon our souls.

Christian zeal is the sprightly vigour and strenuous activity of every holy affection and disposition; an earnestness and intenseness in every spiritual act, of faith and love, of hope and trust, of resignation to God and resolution for him. It is the performance of every act of devotion with life and close application of thought, as those who are in earnest in it; and with the exercise of those pious dispositions which are suitable to it. To praise God with admiring and adoring thoughts of his excellences, with inward gratitude for his benefits, and with a lively sense of our own unworthiness: To confess our sins with a truly broken and contrite spirit, with pungent shame and sorrow for them, and with vigorous resolutions against them: To *pour out our hearts* in prayer, to *labour fervently in it*, as the expression is, *Col. iv. 12.* with the *fervent* or *inworking prayer of a righteous man*: This is to be zealous in religion. To *desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby*; to come to all the means of grace with an aim to receive advantage by them, with a concern to exercise every proper holy affection in them, and to obtain the acceptance of them: This is true fervor in devotion.

We are also to be *zealous of good works*, *Tit. ii. 14.* Every thing that is praise-worthy and commendable, all that may contribute to  
the

the honour of God or the good of mankind. To be zealous of them, is to be very forward to engage in them, chearful in performing them, solicitous to do our utmost in them, that they may be more for quantity and better for quality than hitherto. This is to *do, whatever our hand finds to do, with our might*, Eccl. ix. 10. to *do it heartily*, Col. iii. 23. to *abound in every good work*, 1 Cor. xv. 58. to *be rich in good works*, 1 Tim. vi. 18. Which are so many expressions describing holy zeal.

Zeal is to be shewn in endeavouring to outstrip others in every grace and virtue. This is a noble emulation. We find the word *zeal* once translated *emulations* in a criminal sense, and ranked among *the works of the flesh*; Gal. v. 20. By *emulation* or *zeal* there the Apostle seems to mean *envying* our neighbour, either for his greater share of worldly enjoyments or of useful gifts. Envy is always bad. And the word *zeal* is often so translated in the new Testament, Rom. xiii. 13. *Let us walk —not in strife and envying*, or *zeal*, 1 Cor. iii. 3. *Whereas there is among you zeal, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?* And we are told, 1 Cor. xiii. 4. *Charity envieth not*; in the Greek, *is not zealous*. We are neither to envy the wealth, nor reputation, nor gifts, nor graces of others. But it is a laudable zeal to aspire to the highest attainments in goodness, and to be excited to the greater ardour by all that we see excellent in them; that we may become such examples our selves, that *our zeal*



may provoke very many; as the Apostle tells the *Corinthians* that their zeal in acts of charity did, 2 *Cor.* ix. 2.

Thus our zeal should be first employed about our selves; here we should be warmest, in concern and endeavour, that we our selves may daily become wiser and better, that we may pull out every beam or mote out of our own eyes. And if people were thus in earnest zealous at home, a great deal of irregular zeal to others would be prevented. But then,

5. Christian zeal is not to be confin'd at home, to our own personal goodness; but has still a wider scope. If it is employed abroad, while our own vineyard is not kept, it is a false pretence, and justly offensive to God and man. But the due exercise of it for our own conduct being presupposed, there is a large field for its exercise still behind.

We find many instances of zeal in relation to other men recommended in Scripture. *Phineas* is praised, that he was *zealous for his God*, and shewed it by executing judgment upon an *Israelite* and a *Moabitish* woman for notorious debauchery, *Numb.* xxv. 7, 8, 11, 12. So *St. Paul's spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry*, *Acts* xvii. 16. We are commanded to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, when it is opposed by men of corrupt minds, *Jude* 3. Error and sin, wherever we see them, call for the exercise of our  
zeal

zeal against them. Christ gives it as a singular commendation of the Church of *Ephesus*, that they *could not bear them that were evil*, Rev. ii. 2.

It may be proper to shew more particularly the due regulations and expressions of our zeal upon account of what we may see amiss in others. And,

*First*, What would be *irregular* in the exercise of our zeal.

1. While we express christian zeal, we should take heed of *uncharitableness*: That we pass not rash or too severe censures upon men's character, even when we cannot but judge some of their opinions erroneous, or some of their actions faulty. There has been a great deal of this false fire in the christian world: Christians have often been hereticating and anathematizing one another for matters of doubtful disputation or mere human decisions, as if all religion lay at stake; when the mistake on either hand may consist with their being good Christians. Or if a man has been guilty of an irregular action; it is too common to condemn him hastily for a bad man, and to overlook all that is commendable in him upon that account, when this is but a single and occasional act, and contrary to his habitual character. On the other hand, while we heartily condemn sin and error according to the best of our light; we must not take upon us to cast men out of the christian pale, where

we have not good warrant to exclude them from the word of God.

2. In our zeal against what is amiss in others, we should be careful *that we become not transgressors our selves*. So we shall be, if we suffer our selves to be transported into passion, and join not *meekness* with our zeal. When the people of *Israel* sinfully murmured against God and *Moses* for want of water in the wilderness, *Moses* was too far transported with anger, and spake unadvisedly with his lips; *Hear now*, says he, *ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?* Numb. xx. 10. For this, as a mark of displeasure, God denied *Moses* an entrance into *Canaan*, ver. 12. And we shall be much more transgressors, if our zeal against men's supposed or real errors or sins degenerate into hatred and ill-will to their persons. We are *not to hate them*, tho' we are *not to suffer sin to lye upon them*, Lev. xix. 17. This is that *bitter zeal* spoken of by St. *James*, chap. iii. 14. of which he says, ver. 15. that it *descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish*.

3. We should not in our zeal use *any methods* to advance even God's truth and interest, or to suppress errors and disorders, *for which our Master gives us no warrant*. Zeal for truth will not justify the use of the civil sword to punish men for a mistaken conscience; when this is not the way to in-

lighten

lighten men's minds, or change their judgments ; when Christ and his Apostles have intimated no other method for propagating the truth, but fair reasoning and argument ; when Christ discountenances even such a zeal as calls for fire from heaven against his worst enemies, *Luke ix. 54, 55.* Certainly imprisonments and banishments, fire and faggot are none of his ways to suppress error.

4. Regular zeal will not lead men to bear testimony against the sins of men in any way which is *not warrantable in their stations.* How fit and necessary so ever it is, that open vice should receive punishment, as the bane of society ; yet it would be an irregular zeal in private persons to take the magistrate's work out of his hand, and pretend to do this themselves. If any should imagine themselves countenanced in such zeal by the case of *Phinehas*, when he executed judgment upon *Zimri* and *Cozbi* ; a little consideration will shew the vanity of such a plea. *Phinehas* was himself a ruler or judge, as we are told, *1 Chron. ix. 20.* And an order had been delivered for such an execution by *Moses* the chief magistrate, *Numb. xxv. 5.* *Moses said to the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his man.* The crime was capital by law, the fact was notorious, and *Phinehas* had a commission from *Moses* to inflict the legal punishment. Nothing therefore can give less countenance to wild and extravagant zeal in pri-



vate persons, than this instance, wherein a magistrate was performing the duty of his place, and his proceedings were regular and orderly: But that which made his zeal so commendable, was, that he ventured to execute this judgment in the face of the whole congregation of *Israel*, when the infection was become general, and the number of offenders made it dangerous to do justice.

5. Right zeal should not burn with equal fervor in all cases. Publick and open offenders are much more intolerable, than those who keep within the bounds of privacy: Such as declare their sin as *Sodom*, and have been long accustomed to do evil, than young offenders, who are drawn in by others, and are still willing to hearken to better counsel, *Jude* 22, 23. *Of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.* A partial respect of persons is unworthy of holy zeal; but a prudent distinction of persons, according to the degrees of guilt and obstinacy, is very well consistent with it.

*Secondly*, I would shew what zeal for God in reference to other people's conduct becomes a Christian.

1. We should be affected with proportionable concern at what we judge amiss in others. Zeal will not allow us to say, *Am I my brother's keeper?* as long as we apprehend any thing in him that greatly dishonours God, or endangers his own soul; but will awaken concern

concern and sorrow upon such an occasion. Such was the temper of the *Psalmist*, *Psal.* cxix. 136. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law*, ver. 158. *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.* And of *Lot*, who was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, 2 *Pet.* ii. 8. And of *Paul*, when his spirit was stirred at the sight of the *Athenian* idolatry.

2. We should express our dislike and disapprobation, when the evils of others come in our way. Zeal will induce to reprove sin, where we can have any hope to reclaim the sinner, or to stop the progress of sin, or to prevent the infection of others thereby; or if we have reason to apprehend, that silence will be interpreted for connivance and approbation. *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but reprove them rather*, *Eph.* v. 11. Indeed if we should be cast among known and impudent scorers, possibly silence it self may be one of the best ways of reprovng them.

3. We should chearfully and vigorously use the best means in our power for the good of others. Zeal for God and for the welfare of others will inspire every man in his private capacity, to endeavour to prevent the infection of those under his care and charge, or to recover them if possible, by faithful instruction and admonition. It will engage ministers to fervor in their preaching, and diligence in their stations to convert sinners, to con-

vince gainfayers, to defend the truth, to recover the fallen, and to stir up all to love and to good works. It will spirit magistrates to put the laws of their country in execution against notorious transgressors ; *knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and the disobedient, &c.* 1 Tim. i. 9, 10. It was not enough in *Eli*, as a parent to admonish his sons of their notorious crimes: Tho' they were now grown up, he was a magistrate ; and in that capacity should have punished them as well as others for their enormous crimes. God so highly resented his neglect herein, that he calls it *despising him*, and brought vengeance on him and his house for it. The same principle of zeal should dispose private persons to assist the magistrate in endeavours for reformation of manners, by bringing open offenders within his cognizance ; without which his hand cannot reach them, and laws must be an useless thing. *Both a partner with a thief, and he that heareth cursing and bewrayeth it not, wrong their own souls*, Prov. xxix. 24.

4. We should not chuse to make ill men our chosen companions, farther than necessity requires. Zeal against sin, and indeed for the safety of our own souls, will carry us not to like and chuse their society ; not to rake pleasure in being where God is openly dishonoured. Instead of that, we should chuse with *David* to be *companions of them that fear God, and of those that keep his precepts*,  
Psal.

*Pfal. cxix. 63. And especially for that reason, to constitute our families if possible of such : as in Psal. ci. 4. A froward heart shall depart from me, I will not know a wicked person, ver. 6, 7. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me : he that walketh in a perfect way, shall serve me. He that worketh deceit, shall not dwell within my house ; he that telleth lies, shall not tarry in my sight.*

II. I proceed in the second place to mention some of the obligations, which lie upon Christ's Disciples to be regularly zealous.

1. The importance of religion deserves our zeal. It is that wherein the honour of God, the present welfare of the world, and the everlasting interest of our selves and others is more concerned than in any thing else. And where then should zeal and fervor be employed, if not here?

2. The difficulties that attend religion, make zeal necessary. There are many indispositions within our selves, and many oppositions from without, that will never be surmounted without a holy fervor. When we are remiss, our enemies are vigilant and active. Indeed the maintenance of a right zeal is of the utmost consequence for our own security against infection by the many evils around us. It is an easy transition from conversing with sin and sinners with indifference, to learn their ways



ways and become like unto them. By this means people of a sober education are gradually drawn off from wisdom's ways.

3. Sincerity in religion obliges to zeal. If we love God, we shall *hate evil*, Psal. xcvi.

10. And so great is his excellence, and sin's evil, that if our affection be right set between both, we cannot remain cold and indifferent for the one or against the other.

4. The end of religion, divine acceptance, cannot be obtained without zeal. Christ plainly declares this in the context; where he threatens the *Laodiceans* with utter rejection, because they were neither cold nor hot; and therefore calls them to repentance, and to resume a warmth and spirit in religion, as ever they would avoid so dreadful a doom.

5. The Exercise of regular zeal is the most likely way to do good to others. Not indeed when we treat them with supercilious contempt, or with a peevish moroseness; or when pretended zeal breaks in upon the offices of humanity, civility, or charity. But if they see, along with all the marks of love and goodwill to their persons, that we are in earnest in religion our selves; that we dare not run with them to the same excess of riot, nor comply with them in their sins and errors: It is natural to inquire in such a case; why do these people act against the stream of the world? why will not they allow themselves to behave as we do? why do they shew uneasiness, when we speak profanely, or act loosely? why do they

they chuse to expose themselves to censure and dislike? If this be a steady conduct, joined with the expressions of benevolence and civility upon other occasions, God may lead them to see, that we dare not go their lengths *because of the fear of the Lord*; and it may dispose them to consideration, and to hear with patience what we have to offer for God and religion.

6. Zeal is eminently recommended by the example of the great head of our religion, the Lord Jesus. As man and Mediator, he was always fervent in his course of obedience. *I must, says he, work the work of him that sent me, while it is day*, Joh. ix. 4. He expressed the most vigorous concern for the honour of God, and for all that belonged to him; whereby the Evangelist takes notice, that that ancient passage spoken in his person in a prophetic *Psalms*, was accomplished; *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*, John ii. 17. How ardent was his love to souls, and his zeal against sin upon all occasions? We are obliged to learn this, as well as other graces of him; to be zealous in the work assigned to us, as he was in his; to be zealous and active for God in our stations; and to have his interest much at heart, as he had ours.

Upon the whole,

1. We should seriously examine how we comply with this exhortation; or whether the character, which our Lord had reprov'd in the  
context,

context, be our character. Have we ever to this day began to be in earnest in religion, or only made it a by-business? Is any zeal we seem to express, the meer fruit of a natural warmth of temper, or the fruit of religious principles? Is it *a godly zeal*? 2 Cor. xi. 2. a zeal for God, founded on the authority of God, and directed by the will of God? Is our warmest zeal for the substantial and most indisputable parts of religion? Is our zeal first, most constantly, and most earnestly spent upon the advancement of the power and practice of godliness in our selves? Have we not *left our first love*? have we not abated in the life and vigour of holy dispositions, of pious resolutions? in the spirituality of the acts of devotion? in tender fear of sin, and watchfulness against it? in endeavours to do good? These are inquiries of the greatest concern to all that call themselves Christians.

2. We should heartily and speedily *repent*, according to the evidence against us which conscience gives in upon inquiry. If we have lived long under the Gospel, and never felt its vital quickning heat, but have remained dead to this day; is it not high time to arise from the dead? to bewail our past stupidity, and miserable trifling in the matters of our souls; and before it is too late, to turn the main stream of our concern and care to our everlasting interests and the means of securing them?

If there was once some holy fervor begun, but it is not with us now as in days past; let us  
*remember*

*remember from whence we are fallen, and repent, and do our first works,* Rev. ii. 5. How ungrateful and aggravated is such a declension in those, who have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious? Shall the avowed servants of sin and Satan be more zealous in the way to death, than the professed servants of Christ in their way to heaven? It may be we were once very zealous and active for sin; let the thought of that quicken our zeal now in a better way. If we remit our fervor, the state of our souls will suffer unspeakable loss, the pleasure and relish of every duty will proportionably abate; our zeal it self is like to take another course, for it will be exercised one way or another; and if we should be saved upon repentance at last, it will be *as by fire*.

Let us therefore frequently converse with the word of God, by which our zeal is to be excited and regulated: Often represent to our selves the great motives of the Gospel; the fervor of redeeming love, the constant observation of God, the danger of apostacy, the shortness of time, the greatness and nearness of the reward, if we faint not: And along with all, often pray for the light and quickning influences of the divine Spirit. So religion will have power in us now, the peace of God will rule in our hearts, and we shall be able to go with full sails to glory.





# SERMON XIX.



## Christian Prudence.



MATTH. X. 16.

*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*



OUR blessed Saviour observes, that *the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light*, Luke xvi. 8. That is; it is too commonly true, that those who have chosen their portion in this life, use more prudence

dence to gain their end, than people, who have had the wisdom to determine upon a better happiness, do in pursuit of their nobler end. This is too often fact, but at the same time is no small reproach upon Christians: They should use as much wisdom in *prosecution* of their end, as they did in the *choice* of it; and have need of wisdom in the management of the christian life, in which they are engaged, as much as worldly men have to compass their aims below. The following discourse is to be upon this argument of *christian prudence*, for which the words of the text may be a proper foundation.

They are a part of Christ's instructions to his Apostles, when he sent them out only upon a special commission in *Judea*: But several of the instructions seem much more to point forward to events, that should befall them in the execution of a more general commission, which they were to receive after Christ's ascension. Thus particularly, the warning he gives them of difficulties, dangers and persecutions that awaited them, and the directions for their conduct in them, are to be understood. These begin in the text. Wherein Christ *first* represents the dangerous state they would be in. *I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.* They would find the generality of the world about them like wolves, ready to devour and make a prey; and they would be as sheep in the midst of these wolves, very unable of themselves to resist their rage, and of  
so

so contrary a nature and disposition to them, that for that reason they might expect to be the more violently hated by them.

In such circumstances Christ gives them a double advice. *Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.* It is said in *Gen. iii. 1.* that *the serpent was wiser than any beast of the field.* Though that is principally meant of the old serpent, yet an allusion seems intended to the sagacity of the animal it self, of which Naturalists have observed several instances: And from thence our Saviour seems to use the wisdom of the serpent as a proverbial phrase. On the other hand, the dove is noted for one of the most harmless birds, as the sheep is among the beasts. Christ directs his Disciples to unite these two things in their conduct, wisdom or prudence, and innocence.

The lot of good men in all ages bears some resemblance to the case of the Apostles as described here; and therefore the direction may be considered as of general use. We find another very like it laid down by the Apostle, *1 Cor. xiv. 20. Brethren, be not children in understanding: Howbeit in malice, or, evil be ye children, but in understanding be men.*

Upon this head, I would 1<sup>st</sup>, Briefly explain the double direction given us. 2<sup>dly</sup>, Point at some principal instances, wherein we shall find christian prudence, in conjunction with innocence, very necessary and serviceable. And 3<sup>dly</sup>, Inforce the exhortation from the description given of our state in this world.

I. I would briefly explain the double direction given us. And I chuse to begin with the last, because the wisdom, to which we are directed, cannot well be explained without first considering the other.

1. We are required to be *harmless*. We find the original word only twice besides in the new Testament: In *Rom. xvi. 19.* where it is rendered, *SIMPLE concerning evil*: And in *Phil. ii. 15.* where it is translated as here, *harmless*. Several accounts are given of the derivation of the word; but I apprehend the most probable to be, that it is a metaphor taken from \* *unruly beasts that push with their horns*. The design of it is well expressed by our translation, *harmless*. This should be the first care of every Christian, that he be inoffensive in his whole conduct, or, as *St. Paul* says, *may keep a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward men*; and I may add, towards our selves also.

It should be our care *with respect to God*, that we wrong not him of his rights, by neglecting any part of the homage and allegiance that we owe him. A sinner is represented by *Eliphaz* in a phrase not unsuitable to that in the text, as *running upon God, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his buckler*, *Job xv. 26.* He is indeed altogether a-

\* ἀνέπατος. Α νέπατος, cornutus. Metaphora sumta a bestiis cornutis. Constantin.



bove receiving any real prejudice from us; but sin is acting against him, as much as it is in our power to do; it is a wrong and injustice offered him. Here therefore we should study to be inoffensive.

*With respect to our neighbour*, we should be careful that we give no just ground of offence; by denying him any of his just claims from us, or depriving him of his rights, either in his person, or substance, or reputation. *Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art*, in the strictest sense, *Job xxxv. 8*. Being harmless in common acceptation principally relates to our neighbour. But besides this,

We have a farther concern *in relation to our selves*; that whatever we do, we *wrong not our own souls*, but are true to their interests, to their present peace and purity, and their everlasting happiness. And that a due provision may be made for our temporal well-being, as far as may consist with our superior engagements.

This is the harmlessness or innocence, which we should make it our business to maintain; that our duty to all, in the several relations wherein we stand, may be conscientiously and inviolably observed. And now it will be easy to discern what is intended by the other part of the direction.

2. We are required to *be wise as serpents*. And as this stands in connection with the former particular, we may plainly collect two things for explaining it.

1<sup>st</sup>, That

1<sup>st</sup>, That no rules of policy are to be observed, which are inconsistent with innocence and a good conscience. The most prudential methods that can be thought of to compass a bad end, or those which may bear the most promising aspect of success in order to obtain a good end, if they are known to be unlawful, are alike abomination to God, and should be so to every good man; for in both there is the wisdom of the serpent without the innocence of the dove. Trick and falshood, *cunning craftiness*, as the Scripture calls it, is a very different thing from christian prudence. It is *the wisdom of this world*, which is *foolishness with God*, 1 Cor. iii. 19. *Fleshy wisdom*, which stands opposed to *simplicity and godly sincerity*, 2 Cor. i. 12. or the *wisdom* which St. James pronounces to be *earthly, sensual, devilish*, Jam. iii. 15. Not the laudable wisdom of the serpent, but the wicked craft of the old serpent. Known duty is a line, beyond which we must not suffer ourselves to go upon any pretence of convenience or prudence.

2<sup>dly</sup>, The wisdom, to which we are directed, is that by which we may most effectually be enabled to discern and discharge our duty. It presupposes a conscientious regard to duty, a hearty desire to know and practise it: And the province of christian prudence is only to second this design, to facilitate and improve the performance: When we have fixed a right end, to find out the most suitable means

for attaining it : To judge of the proper times and seasons of things, as *every thing is beautiful in its season*, and that one branch of duty may not interfere with another : To consider the circumstances of providence from time to time, and so to discern our present duty, and *bear fruit in season* : To weigh the circumstances of cases as they occur, which may sometimes make it difficult to discover on which side of a question duty lies ; and so to direct and guide our practice.

The Scripture speaks of some, *Jer. iv. 22. who were wise to do evil, but to do good they had no knowledge* : They shewed a great deal of art and cunning in the management of their wicked practices, but were most unfurnished and unexpert for the performance of any thing truly commendable. In opposition to such a character, the Apostle expresses his wishes for the *Romans*, *Rom. xvi. 19. I would have you wise to that which is good, and simple concerning evil*. Which is a good exposition of our Saviour's direction in the text. *The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way*, *Prov. xiv. 8*. First and principally to learn the way to heaven, which is prescribed to all ; and then the way of particular duty, according to our special and distinguishing circumstances : And to understand the best manner of performing our duty, in order to reach the end proposed in it ; as it is said, *Eccl. viii. 5. A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment*.

This



SER. XIX. *Christian Prudence.* 437

This is a general view of the wisdom or prudence recommended.

II. I would now consider some principal instances, wherein we shall find christian prudence, in conjunction with innocence, very necessary and serviceable. And we may take a short view of the *three* great branches of our duty to this purpose.

I. Prudence, as well as conscientiousness, is necessary in the exercise of *godliness*, or our direct *duty to God himself*. An honest upright heart, truly devoted to God, tho' it is the principal thing, yet will need the aids of prudence to facilitate the practice of piety, to promote the pleasure and the lustre of it.

We must not omit any branch of real piety, or of the due homage which God requires from us, to avoid the reproaches of profane people; nor make it our main end in any religious exercises to be seen of men: That would be carnal policy. But it is christian prudence, to avoid any such indecencies in our outward behaviour in sacred exercises, as may unnecessarily give men offence, or a handle for reproach and censure. By this means we are most likely to honour God, and recommend his ways to men.

Wisdom is also profitable to direct to the proper seasons for the exercise of the several holy dispositions, of which piety consists: That God may have the acknowledgments from us, which his providences and our condition



from time to time require. There is a peculiar seasonableness and propriety in the exercise of some gracious dispositions and in some branches of worship, at special times and under particular circumstances: And it is a part of prudence to observe these, and judge aright of them, and to direct the frame and actions accordingly. We are directed *in the day of prosperity to be joyful, and in the day of adversity to consider*, Eccl. vii. 14. And God blames *Israel* for the unsuitableness of their behaviour to their circumstances, *Isa.* xxii. 12, 13. *In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine.* There is a time to weep, and a time to mourn; and graces, and duties eminently suited to both conditions. We are especially called to awful fear, when God's judgments are abroad; to humble our selves under his mighty hand, when it is laid upon us; to practise submission and patience under his corrections; and trust in him in dark and distressing circumstances: on the other hand, the smiles of his providence, and the light of his countenance, should summon up the lively actings of joy and gratitude, of love and delight. Some seasons especially call for prayer, and others for praise. *Jam.* v. 13. *Is any man among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.* Every pious affection and exercise

SER. XIX. *Christian Prudence.* 439

exercise is most amiable in it self, and most acceptable to God, when it is seasonable and suitable to men's present case. And it is a considerable part of christian prudence carefully to attend to this.

And it is also of use for regulating the *time* and *manner*, and *length* of *our devotions*, so as may best answer the end of them, the promotion of real piety in our selves or others. There is no stated and prescribed rule for these things ; nor can any particular direction be given, which will suit all. The determination of it must be left to prudence, animated by a lively zeal to secure the great end. Thus in *secret devotions*, the general rule for all is, that they manage them so as may be most for the benefit of their own souls. Prudence, under the conduct of a heart truly devoted to God, must direct how it is most likely that this end may be answered, according to a man's constitution and circumstances in the world. For the *Time* ; it must be a rule of prudence ordinarily to be observed, that for duties which are statedly to return, a stated time in the morning and the evening should be pitched upon as that which we intend commonly to imploy this way, farther than extraordinary occasions may make an exception ; and this such a time, wherein upon the knowledge of our own constitutions and business we may expect to be most lively and least interrupted ; for a truly pious mind will not content himself commonly to put God and

his soul off with the dregs of his time and spirits. For the *manner*, prudence, aiming at the great end of piety, must still be our guide. As suppose for the posture used, whether prostration, or kneeling, or standing ; we should chuse that, wherein our minds are most free and least liable to discomposure. By the same measure we should be conducted, either to use the voice, when privacy will admit of it, or to forbear it : And I may add also, either wholly to address to God in such thoughts and expressions as our own hearts suggest, or at some times to use the assistance of pious forms or hints prepared by others, when our own minds may not be in the best frame. For the *length* of them, prudence must direct too ; And I believe most people will find it ordinarily expedient, that their devotions should rather be frequent than long ; that at least the length of them should be proportioned to the fervor and seriousness of the spirit. In the *social* duties of religion, we are concerned to mind the good of others as well as of our own souls ; and therefore christian prudence must consult that. We should adjust the time of our family devotions, as may best comport with the general edification of the members of it ; if possible, when they can be all present, and when they are likely to be least sluggish and indisposed. The matter of our addresses should be things of the most common concern to all, and suitable to the circumstances of the family as such. Care should  
be

be taken in the manner and expressions, that as far as possible, it may not be justly exceptionable. And here especially, in the daily service of God in our families, tediousness is carefully to be avoided; for want of prudence in which, I doubt many children and servants in pious families have been led to disgust religion more than otherwise they would have done.

2. Prudence is equally necessary, to accompany zeal and goodness, in performing *our duty to our selves.*

In the first and fundamental part of it, the *immediate care of our souls.* This cannot be well done without christian prudence. To become well acquainted with the bias of our constitutions and natural tempers, which belongs to prudence, will give us the principal light to discern the *sins that most easily beset us*, and the best methods of escaping them; and to discover the graces and virtues, wherein we have the best prospect of shining. The more we discern *the devices of Satan*, we shall be the better prepared to obviate them: for if we are *ignorant of them*, he is like to *gain an advantage over us*, 2 Cor. ii. 11. Prudence must point us to the happy and advantageous seasons, the promising minutes, which may be most successfully improved for strengthening our good habits, and mortifying the several irregular dispositions that attend us. Prudence descries the temptations, which are apt to excite our irregular appetites, and directs



rects us to avoid them : Whereas if without it we rashly enter into temptation, how difficult is it to preserve our innocence ?

In *making the interests of soul and body consistent*, as far as possible, prudence is of vast service. We must not neglect the care of our bodies, while we sojourn in them ; but endeavour, as far as is practicable, to make the welfare of soul and body to comport together. And this end might in many cases be obtained by the exercise of christian prudence, far more than some good men reach it, or than worldly men think practicable. By a prudent observation and improvement of the proper times and seasons for both, there would be room in the ordinary state of things for all the diligence in men's worldly business that can reasonably be desired, and yet their better interests not be neglected. If men would but observe God's rule for the strict observation of the Lord's day, they would not find that to interfere with a close application to their secular business on other days, nor to their success in it ; and yet they might be able to preserve the strongest affection for things above. Nor would it be difficult with a little prudent forecast, or the *ordering of their affairs with discretion*, so to manage them, that convenient time might be found on every day for the worship of God in private, and in their families, and sometimes occasionally in publick worship, without any detriment to their outward interest. Experience

rience shews this daily, in many instances of people who carry on their trades and worldly business with the greatest success; and yet are very diligent for their souls too in season and out of season.

Thus, by innocent prudence we may often avoid temporal inconveniences for our profession; which we should endeavour to do, as far as may be done without intrenching upon a good conscience. This is the particular case referred to in the text, the escaping of persecution, as far as it may lawfully be avoided. Sometimes it is impossible to be staved off without making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience; and then all regards to the body must give place to the everlasting interest of our souls. So Christ exhorts in this chapter, ver. 28. *Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* But sometimes we may avoid suffering in a time of persecution without violating duty; and we are directed to use any wisdom of the serpent for that purpose consistent with integrity; particularly if we can escape it by flight, ver. 23. *When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.* To the same purpose, *Prov. xxii. 3. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself.* This is an ordinary rule, tho' it may admit of exceptions, as *Nehe-miah* said, *Should such a man as I flee?* *Neh. vi. 11.* Being the supreme magistrate at *Jerusalem,*

*rusalem*, by whose influence and encouragement the *Jews* were chiefly animated in their work, and foreseeing that if he forsook them, they would quit their work and fly too; in this case he resolved to run all risks. The same may be the case of some of a publick character in time of persecution; they may be so circumstanced, that it may not consist with duty to fly. But prudence, upon an impartial weighing of the particular circumstances, must direct in this matter.

Prudence at least will contribute one way very much to our safety from many sufferings. As far as we are governed by it, we shall not expose our selves to sufferings by meer imprudences; which indeed give rise to many instances of unkind usage. Christian prudence will take away the occasions of ill treatment on any other account than *as Christians*; it will not allow us to suffer *as busy-bodies*, or upon account of needless provocations. And I doubt good men too often heighten the ill-will of others against them by such means.

3. Prudence is yet farther necessary to the regular and successful discharge of *our duty to our neighbours*. Innumerable instances might be produced on this head; I shall only single out a few.

Prudence should attend our sincere endeavours to do good to the *souls* of men. Most men are so indifferent about their best interests, and so ready to misinterpret the most honest methods taken for that purpose, that some  
policy

policy and prudence must be used to make such charitable endeavours to go down. He who would hope to succeed in instructing of the ignorant, or convincing of gainfayers, or reforming of the vicious, must take some pains to render himself acceptable, as far as that may be done without sinful compliances. *The preacher must seek to find out acceptable words; only he must be careful, that they be upright, even words of truth,* Eccl. xii. 10. He must be content out of a desire of doing good to imitate St. Paul's example, 1 Cor. ix. 20,—22. *Unto the Jews I become as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law: To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ;) that I might gain them that are without law: To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.* That is, he was ready to condescend to the capacities, humours and prepossessions of all with whom he had a concern, as far as his duty to his Master would allow, in order to be a successful instrument for their good: And so must every faithful minister be content to do, who has the service of Christ and souls at heart. And Christians in a private station should study to *please their neighbour for his good to edification,* Rom. xv. 2. To accommodate themselves by all ca-  
siness



finess of behaviour and prudent address to other people, that they may be the more capable of serving them in their everlasting interests. There is one instance of usefulness to others, which is made a general duty upon Christians, *reproving them for their sins*; but possibly there is not more prudence requisite in the discharge of any one part of religion. A reproof may be thrown away, where it will do more hurt than good, *Prov. ix. 7, 8. He that reproveth a scorner, gets to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man, gets to himself a blot: Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee; rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.* If you see a man desperate in sin, so as to mock at reproof, it is a vain thing to reprove him any longer; you would but provoke him to add sin to sin, and expose your self to needless trouble, without serving any good end by it. But there may be some hope of success in reproofing a *wise man*, one who has yet some commendable modesty remaining, and will patiently give you the hearing. Prudence must make a proper distinction of persons; and it must direct to the fittest opportunities: As, to reprove in private for more private offences; and to observe people's most serious and tender minutes, to take the advantage of convictions or awakening providences: And in like manner to suit a reproof to men's different tempers, capacities and stations. *A word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures*  
*of*

SER. XIX. *Christian Prudence.* 447

*of silver. As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprov-  
er upon an obedient ear, Prov. xxv. 11, 12.*

There is need of prudence to the exercise of mercy and charity to the *bodies* of men. Not only for the management of our outward affairs with discretion, *that we may have to give to him that needeth*, Eph. iv. 28. But to distinguish the most proper objects of charity, since we cannot reach all cases; and to proportion the measures of our bounty to the extent and importance of occasions: And in many cases to judge of the best methods effectually to reach the good ends we propose.

Prudence is of equal use in the management of *common conversation*. To judge when it is fit to speak, and when to keep silence; to consider the different tempers, expectations and views of those with whom we converse, that we may avoid offence: And for directing us in other incidents of society without number. One instance must not be omitted, when we are speaking of *christian* prudence. We are commanded, that *our discourse be good to the use of edifying*, Eph. iv. 29. This plainly intimates, not only that we should be always careful lest any thing pass from us in conversation, which may tend to corrupt the minds of others; but also, that religious discourse, or that which directly tends to their spiritual good, should frequently be our theme in conversation. But wisdom is  
needful

needful to direct in this matter. We should *not cast our pearls before swine*, Mat. vii. 6. *nor speak in the ears of a fool*, who will *despise the wisdom of our words*, Prov. xxiii. 9. That will only furnish very loose people with a subject of mockery. There is also a happy dexterity to be used in accommodating serious discourse to different persons and seasons, if we would reach a good purpose by it; and a propriety to different occasions to be observed. The Apostle gives us a direction of general service in this matter, *Col. iv. 6. Let your speech be always with grace*, in the most grateful and acceptable manner you can; *seasoned with salt*, the salt of wisdom and prudence, which may make it pleasant and beneficial to the hearers; *that ye may know how to answer every man*, that your answers may be well suited to the variety of persons and occasions, which are to be considered in them.

The like observations of the use of prudence might be carried into all the branches of duty, and the various stations and relations of life. But I shall enter no farther into particulars, rather chusing—

III. To offer something to enforce this exhortation from the description given in the text of the state of Christians in this world; that they are *as sheep in the midst of wolves*. The devil as *a roaring lion seeks to devour*; and as an old serpent to seduce; and we should act with all the caution and wisdom

we

we can to defeat him. But the danger suggested here, is principally from men.

Indeed good men are so imperfect in their goodness now, that we are not out of danger from them. Their society and example may have much insnaring in it, which requires precaution for our own safety. But especially the number of bad men even in the best of times calls for much prudence to carry those who are truly good securely and creditably thro' their course of obedience. Such admonitions are always seasonable, *Eph. v. 15, 16. See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise; Redeeming the time, because the days are evil, Col. iv. 5. Walk in wisdom toward those that are without, redeeming the time, Phil. ii. 15. Be harmless and blameless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.* Many ill men are observing us, ever ready to triumph in the least advantage they can gain against us, and to reproach our profession upon that account. If they can find any thing to impeach our moral character, that would make us their reproach and their jest. The *Psalmist* especially deprecates this, *Psal. xxxix 8. Deliver me from all my transgressions; make me not the reproach of the foolish.* "Lord, suffer me not to become their reproach by any real and notorious crimes." But in defect of them, they will gladly lay hold of imprudences to reproach religion and

G g

those



those who pretend to it; and therefore we should endeavour, as far as possible, to prevent their ill-natured satisfaction that way.

Let us then, laying aside all the deceitful arts which are inconsistent with godly sincerity, cultivate the wisdom that is from above; all that may help forward the comfortable and successful performance of our duty, and recommend our holy profession. In matters of importance, and which admit of premeditation, let us deliberately consult not only the matter of our duty, but the most acceptable and amiable manner of performing it: And endeavour to become masters of an habitual furniture of prudence, to direct us upon sudden emergencies; that it may be our character with *the wise man* to have our eyes *in our head*.

A growing acquaintance with the holy Scriptures will be of singular use to our improvement in prudent conduct by the way, as well as to our becoming wise unto salvation. The precepts, the histories contained in those heavenly oracles carefully attended to, will be in this respect *a light to our feet and a lamp to our paths*. The proverbs of *Solomon*, and the pattern of *Christ*, should especially be studied to this purpose. The blessed *Jesus* was not only a pattern of spotless innocence, but a model of consummate prudence; as *in him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. He chose the fittest means in all cases to reach his ends; and took advantage  
of

SER. XIX. *Christian Prudence.* 451

of all occurrences to convey a word in season to those with whom he conversed, in the manner and at the times, wherein his instructions were most apt to make impressi<sup>o</sup>n. When he shewed his charity to their bodies in healing their diseases, or in some other instances of compassion, he laid hold on such happy opportunities to be a monitor also for their better interests. There are many instances in the Gospel-history of his prudent conduct for avoiding dangers, and the effects of his enemies malice, till his time was come ; and of his wary answers to captious and insnaring questions, whereby he either softened the rage of his adversaries, or evaded their wicked intentions. His followers may derive great light from a diligent observation of his behaviour attended with the various circumstances.

The lives of wise and good men, of which there are many written for our use, may furnish us with several profitable hints to make us wiser as well as better. And especially *experience* will enable us to make a succesful progress in this needful skill, if we are but careful observers of men and things around us, and principally of our selves and our own conduct : Then *days will speak, and growing years will teach wisdom* ; if we use our selves to recollect, where we have taken a wrong step, that it may not be repeated ; and where we have succeeded well, that we may be in a readiness to conduct our selves in a like manner, if the same occasions occur again. And along  
with

with our own care, from a sense of the many imprudences to which we are liable, and of the various unforeseen trials which we can hardly be provided for by any precautions of our own, *let us daily ask wisdom of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not.* The constant guidance and conduct of the alwise and holy God, will be our best security thro' a dangerous world, and will bring us to glory at the end of life.

*I pray therefore that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.*

*The End of the second Volume.*

### *E R R A T A* in the second Volume.

**P**AGE 36. line 16. for *unchangeable*, read *changeable*. p. 55. l. p. r. *unspeakably*. p. 92. l. 26. for *general*, r. *particular*. p. 144. l. 9. for , put . p. 153. l. 12. r. *difficulties*. p. 158. l. 11. f. *forgiven*, r. *given*. p. 181. l. 30. f. *in*, r. *is*. p. 241. l. 17. r. *to God*. p. 340. l. 1. f. ? put ; p. 352. l. 14. 15. r. *entering*. p. 377. l. 31. r. *what ground*, l. 32. r. *that disorders*. p. 381. l. 27. r. *came*. p. 403. l. 16. del. *a*.



5.  
ar.  
S.  
I.  
5.  
or